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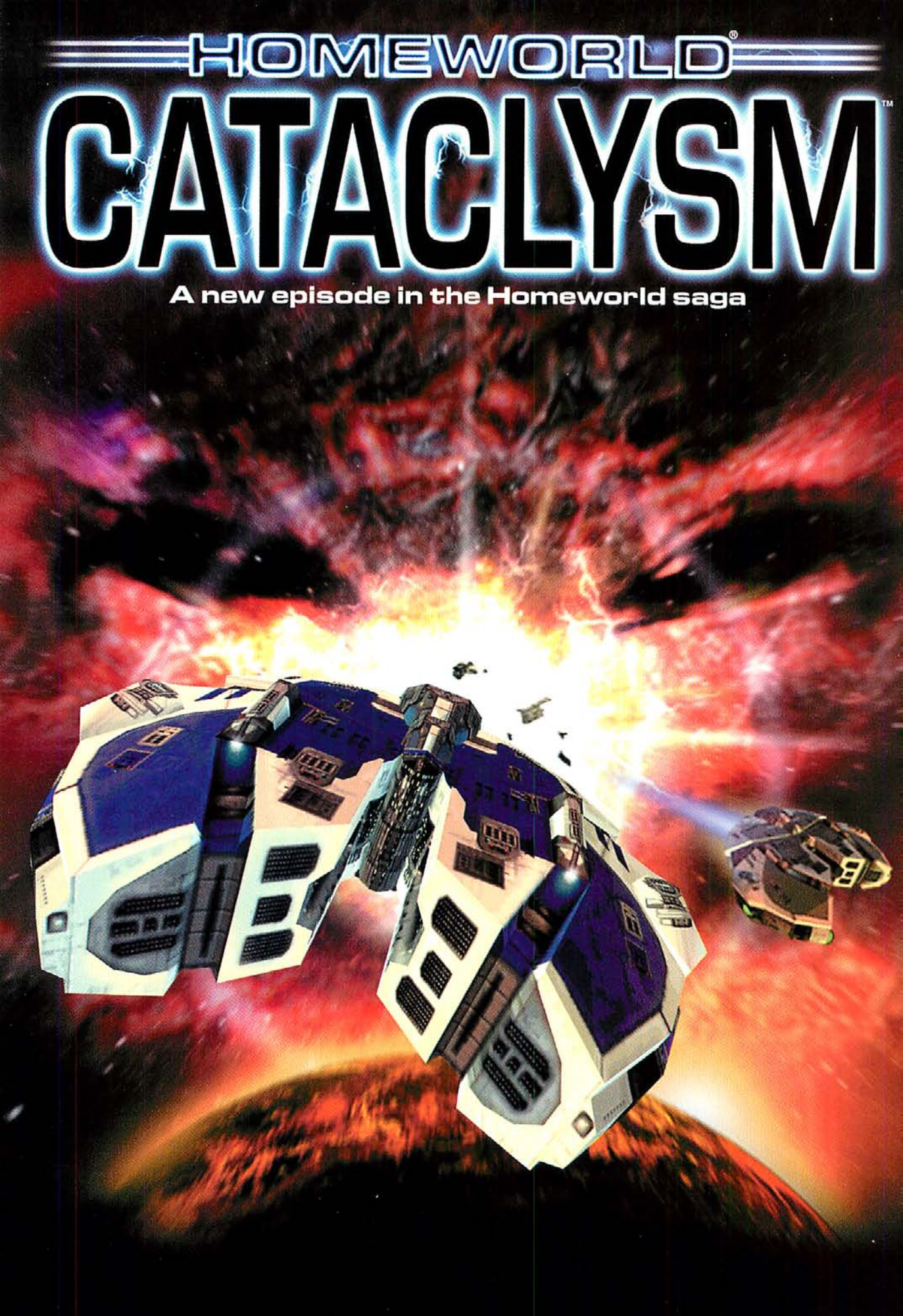
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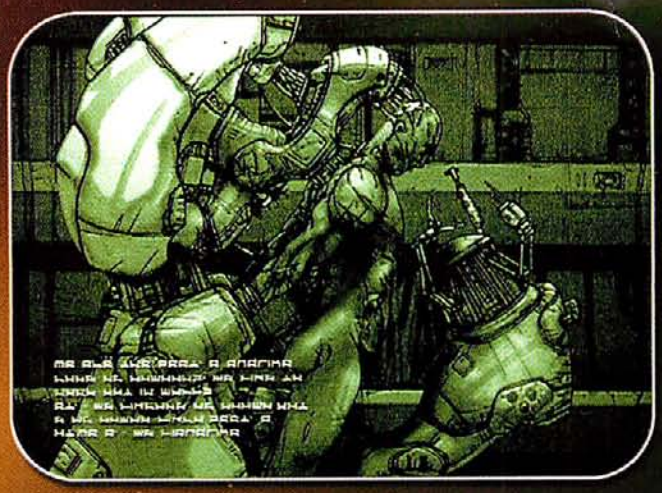
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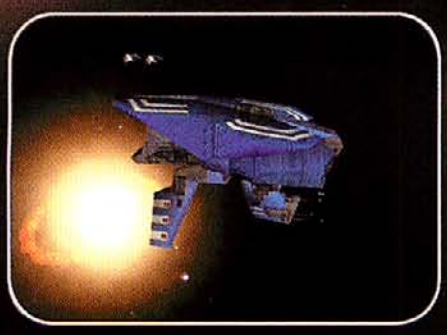
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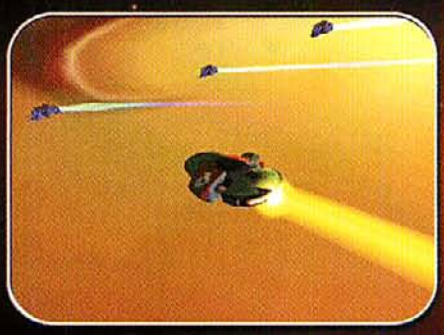
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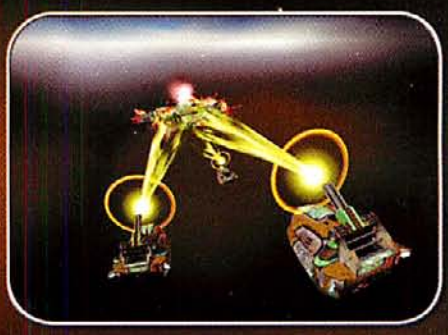




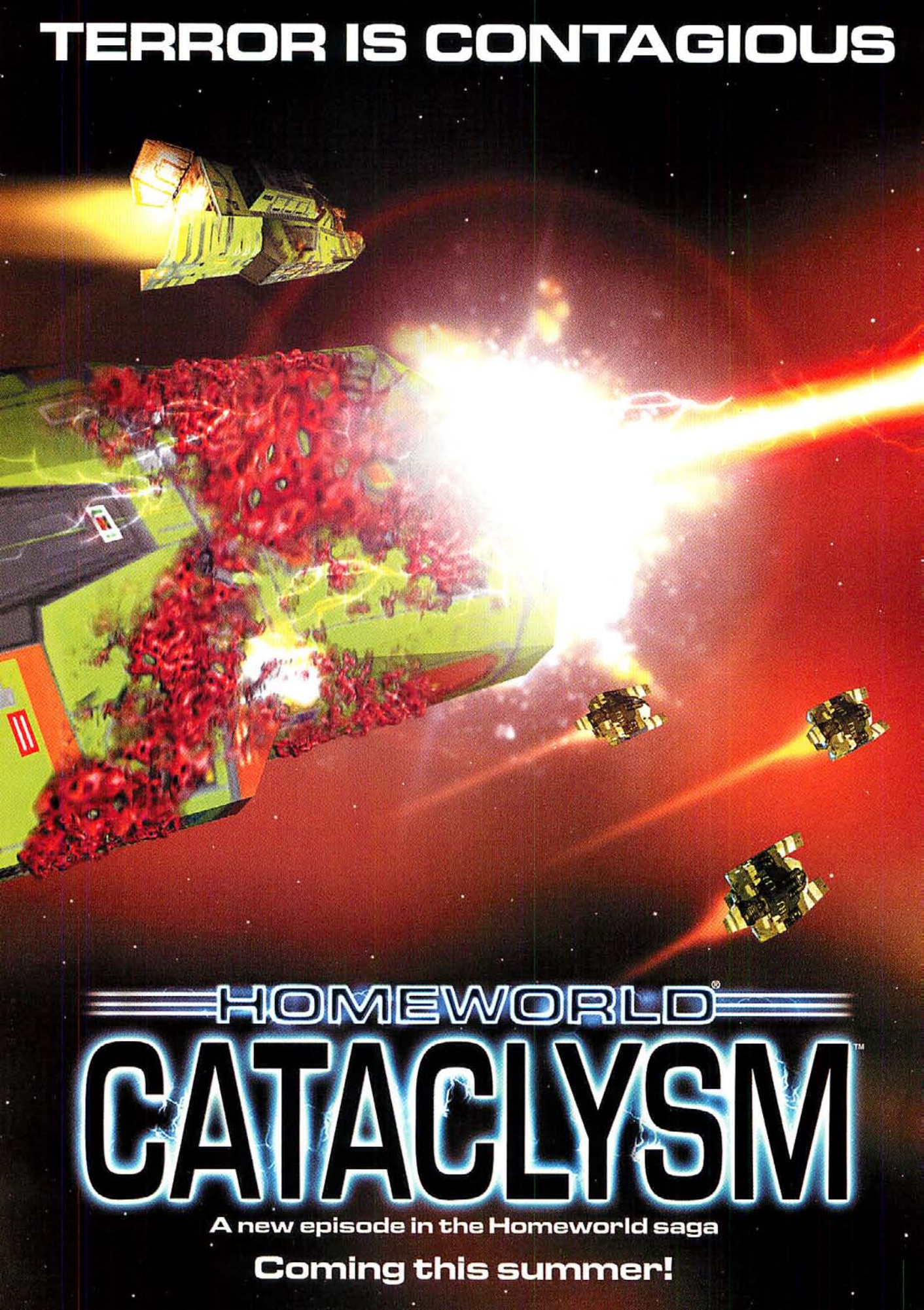
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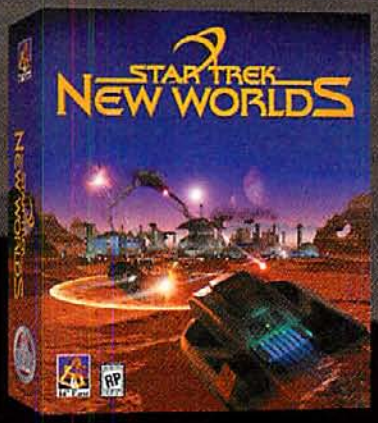
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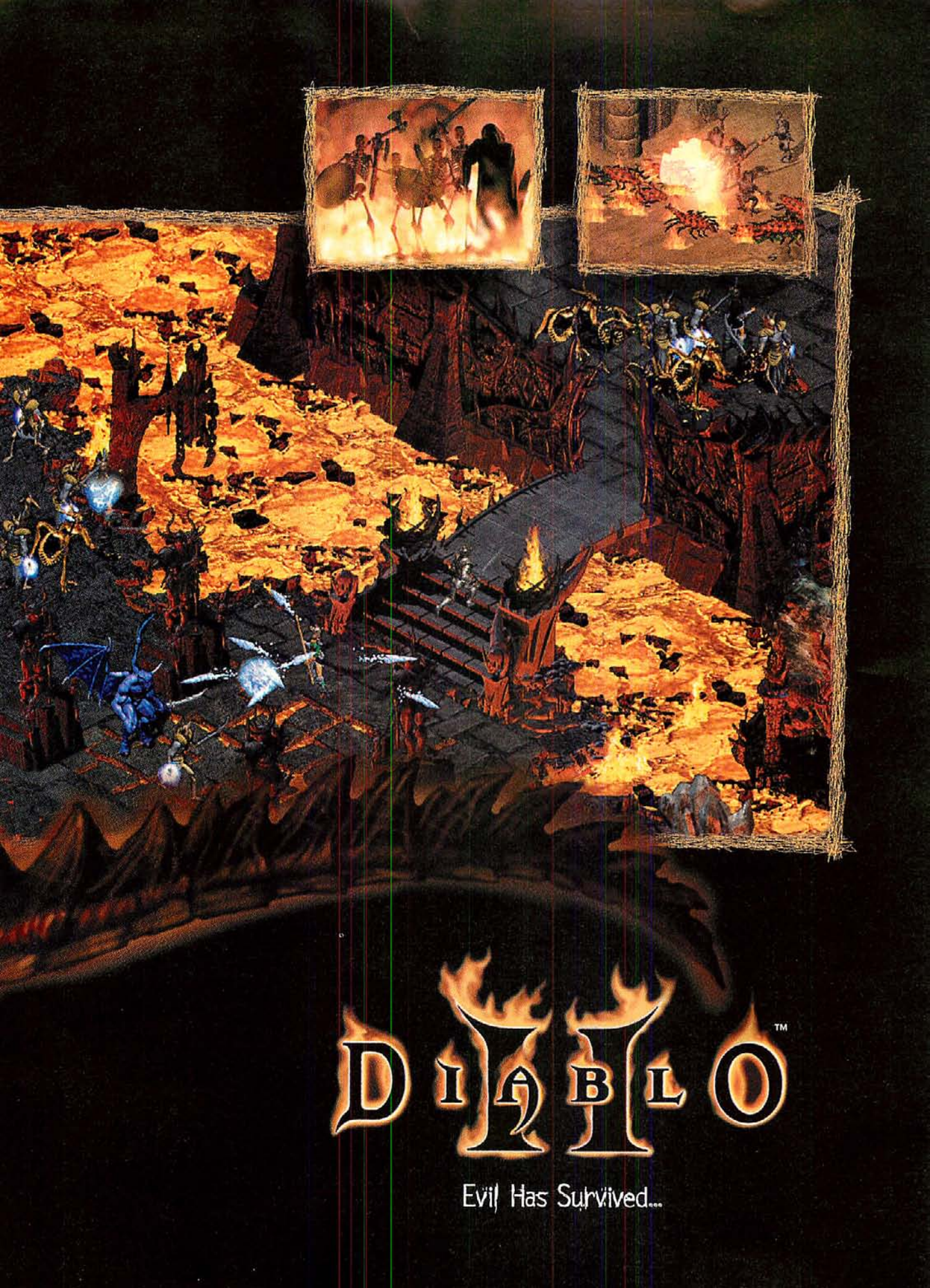
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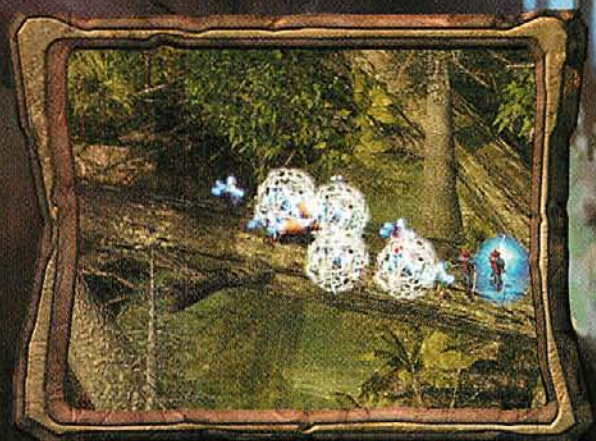
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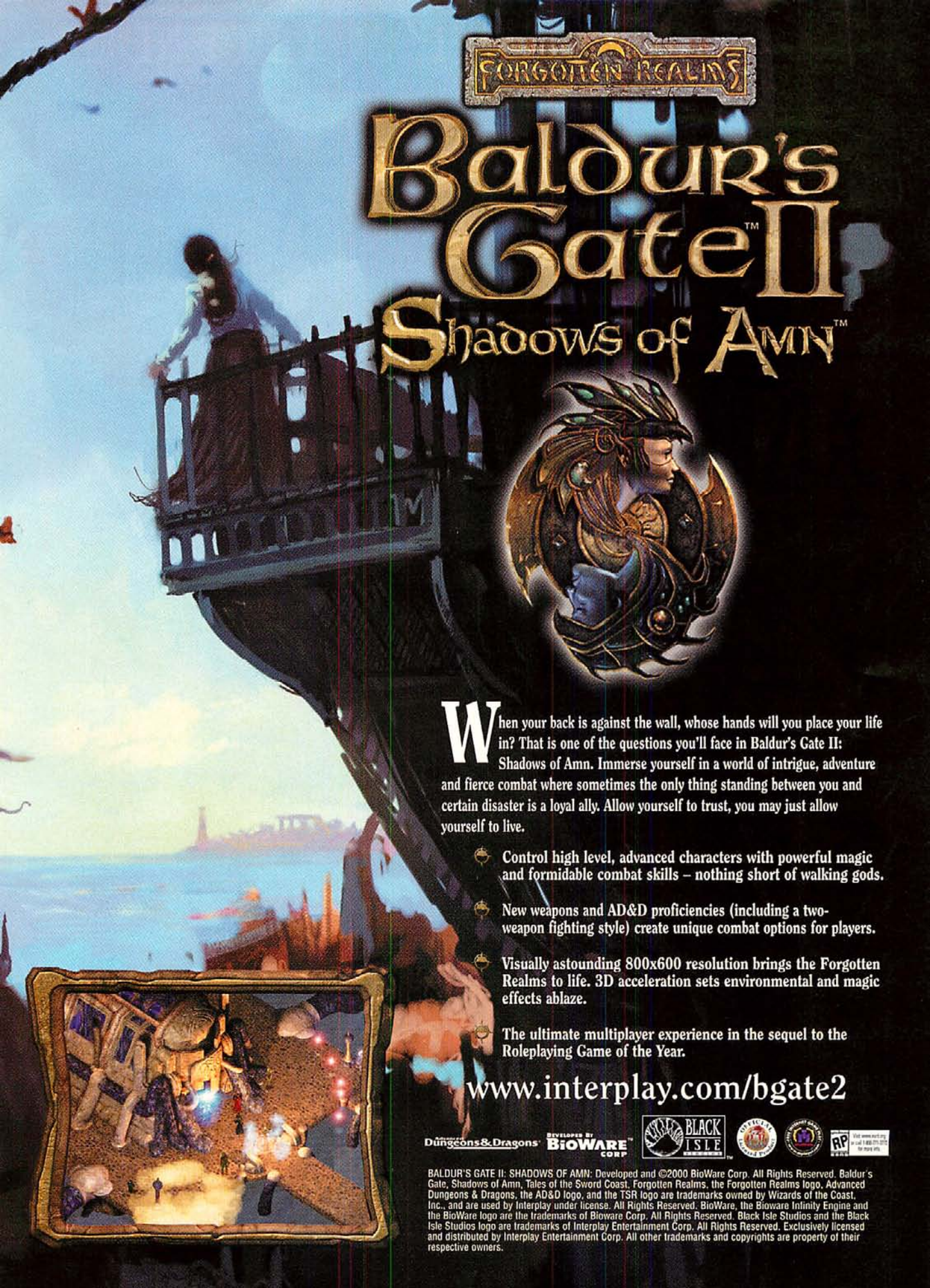
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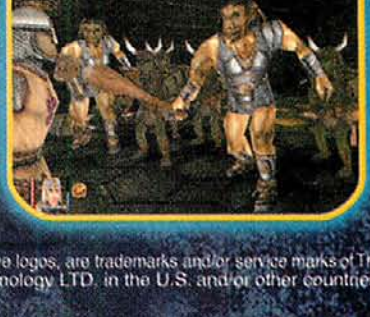

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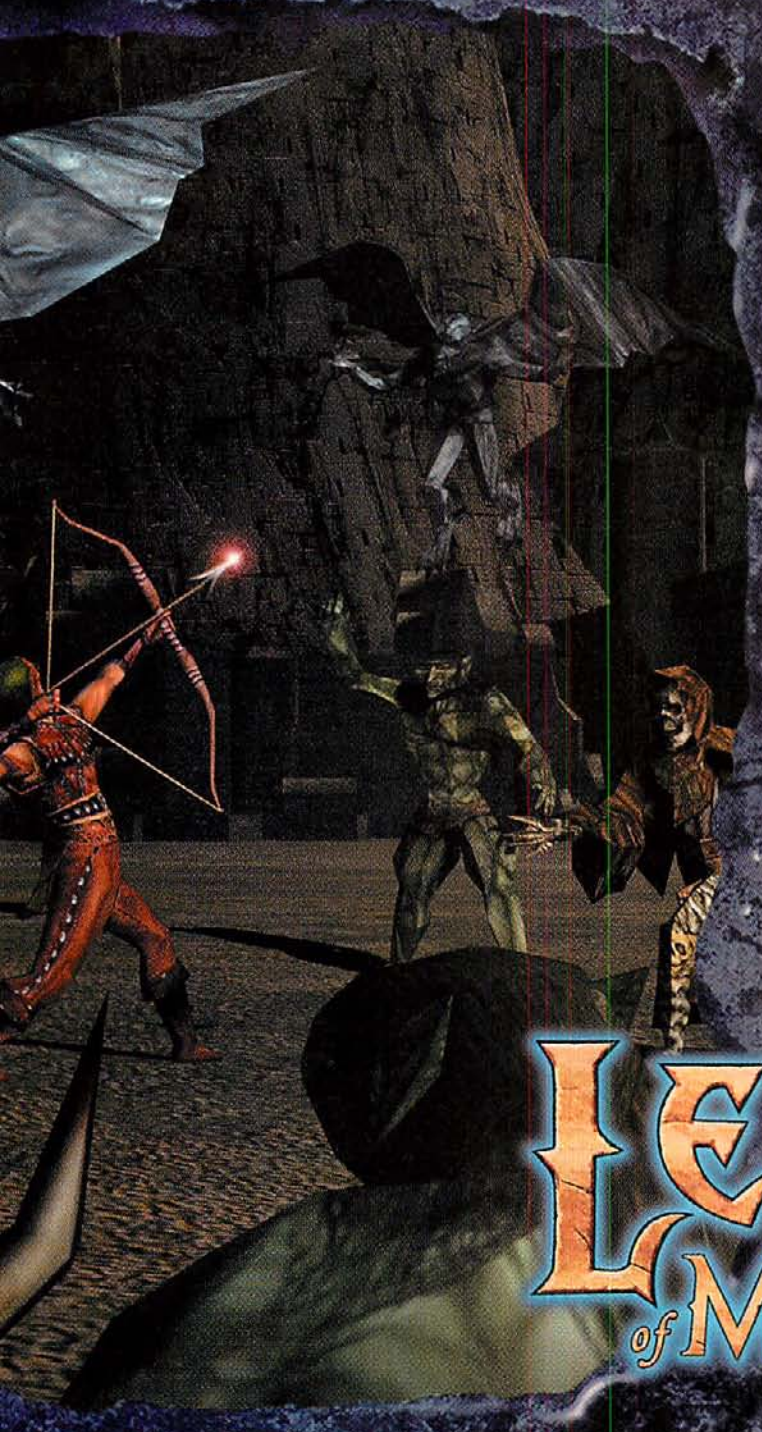






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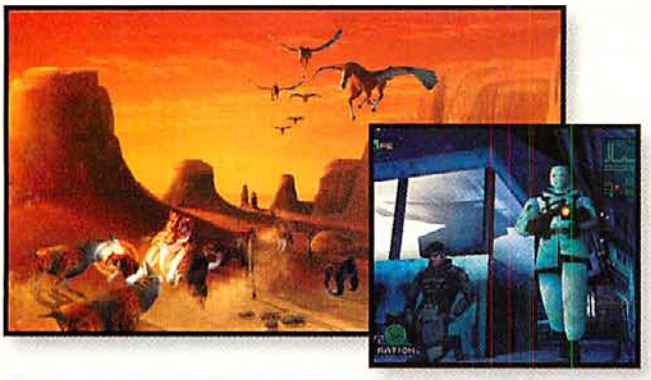
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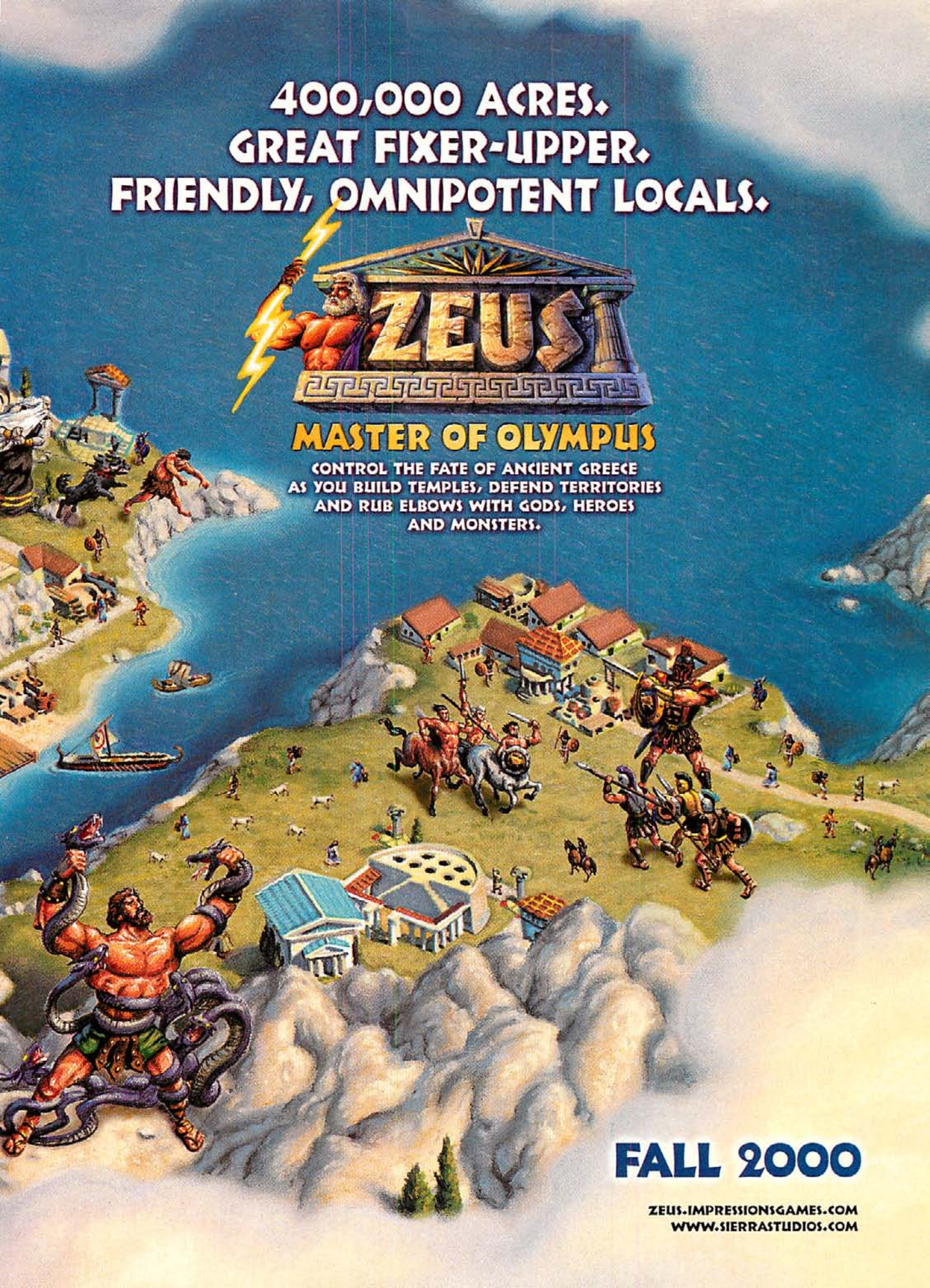
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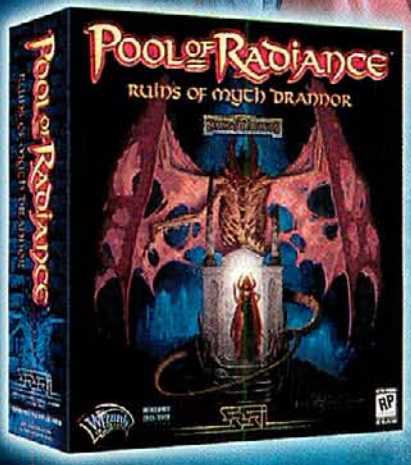
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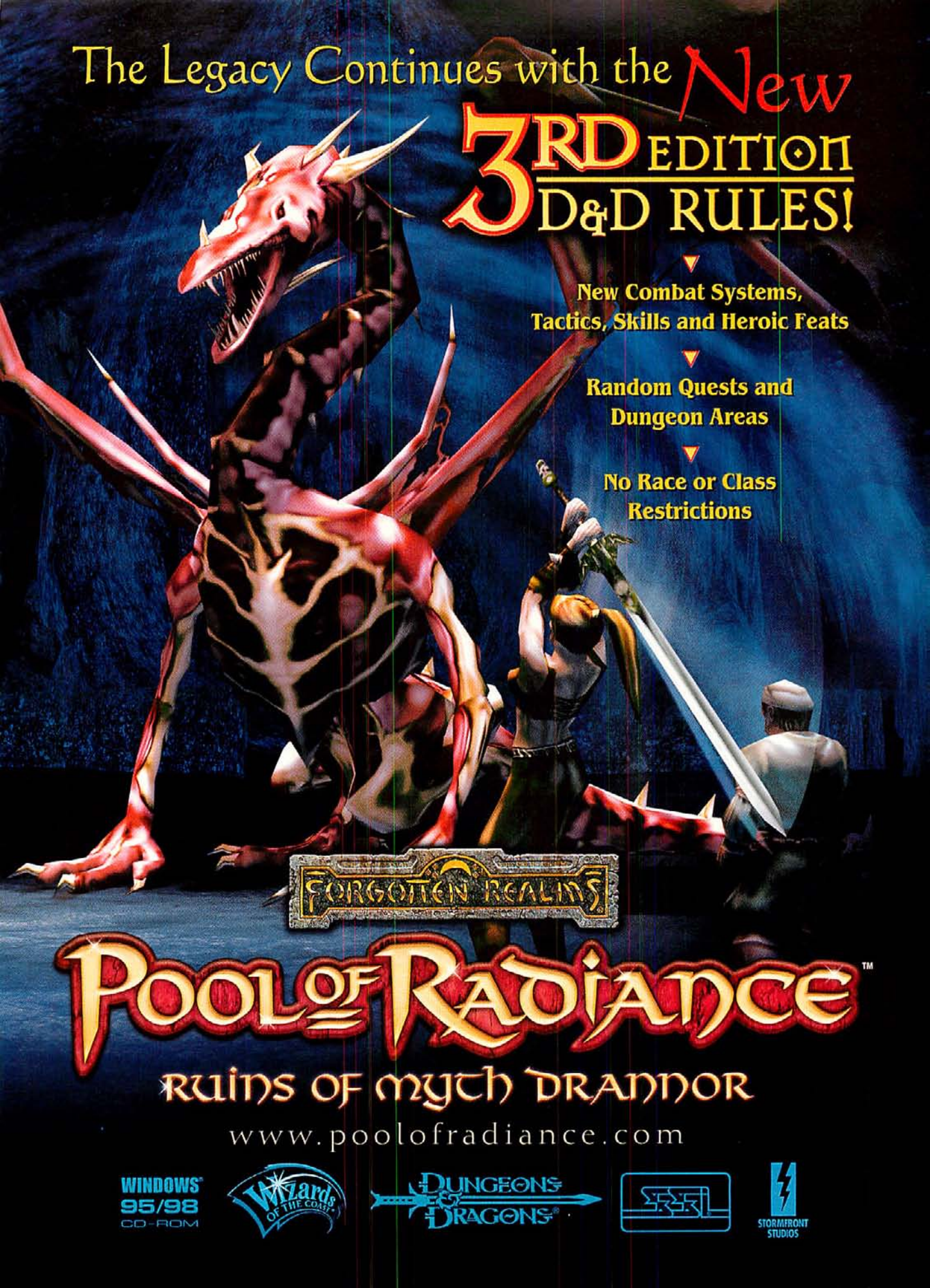
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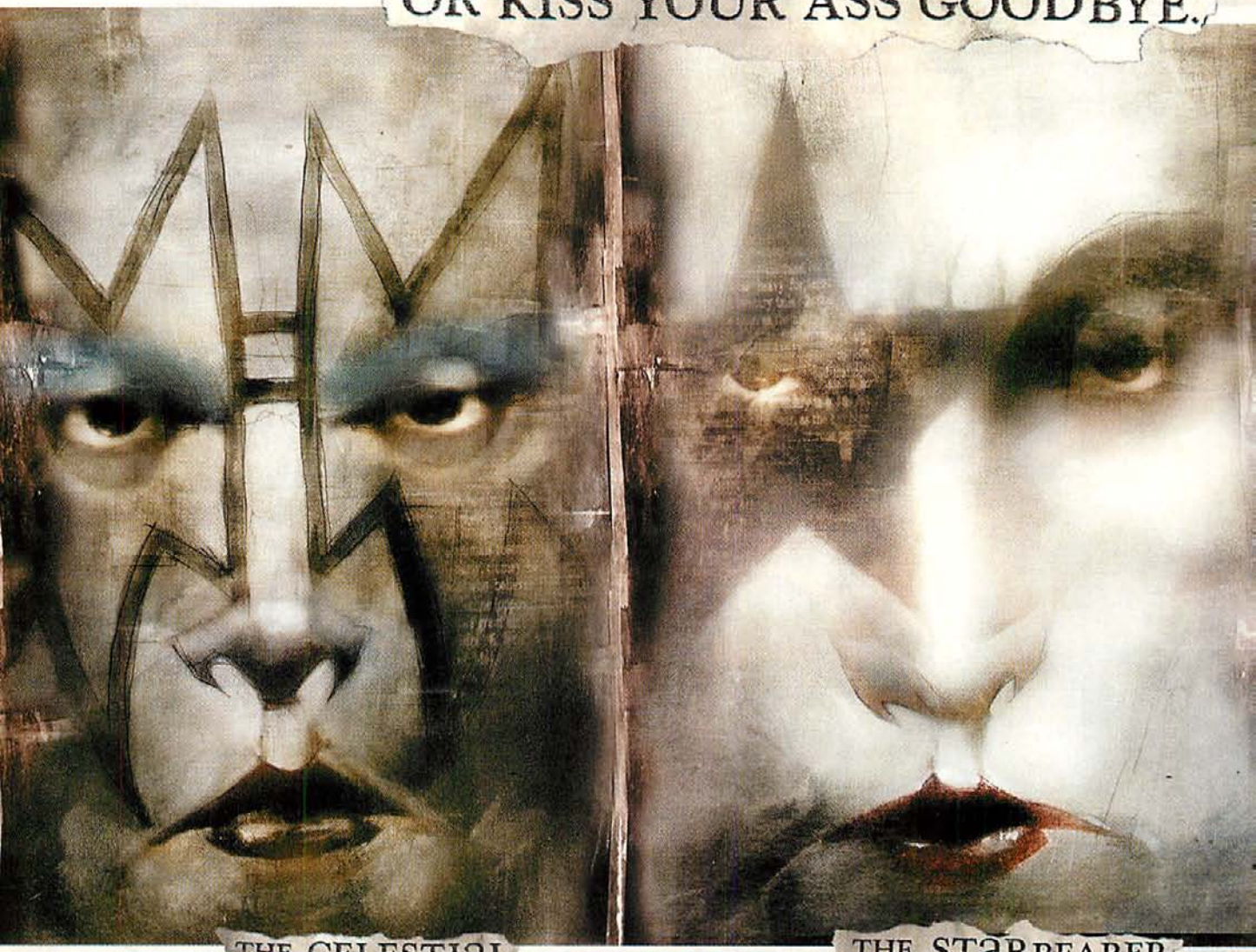
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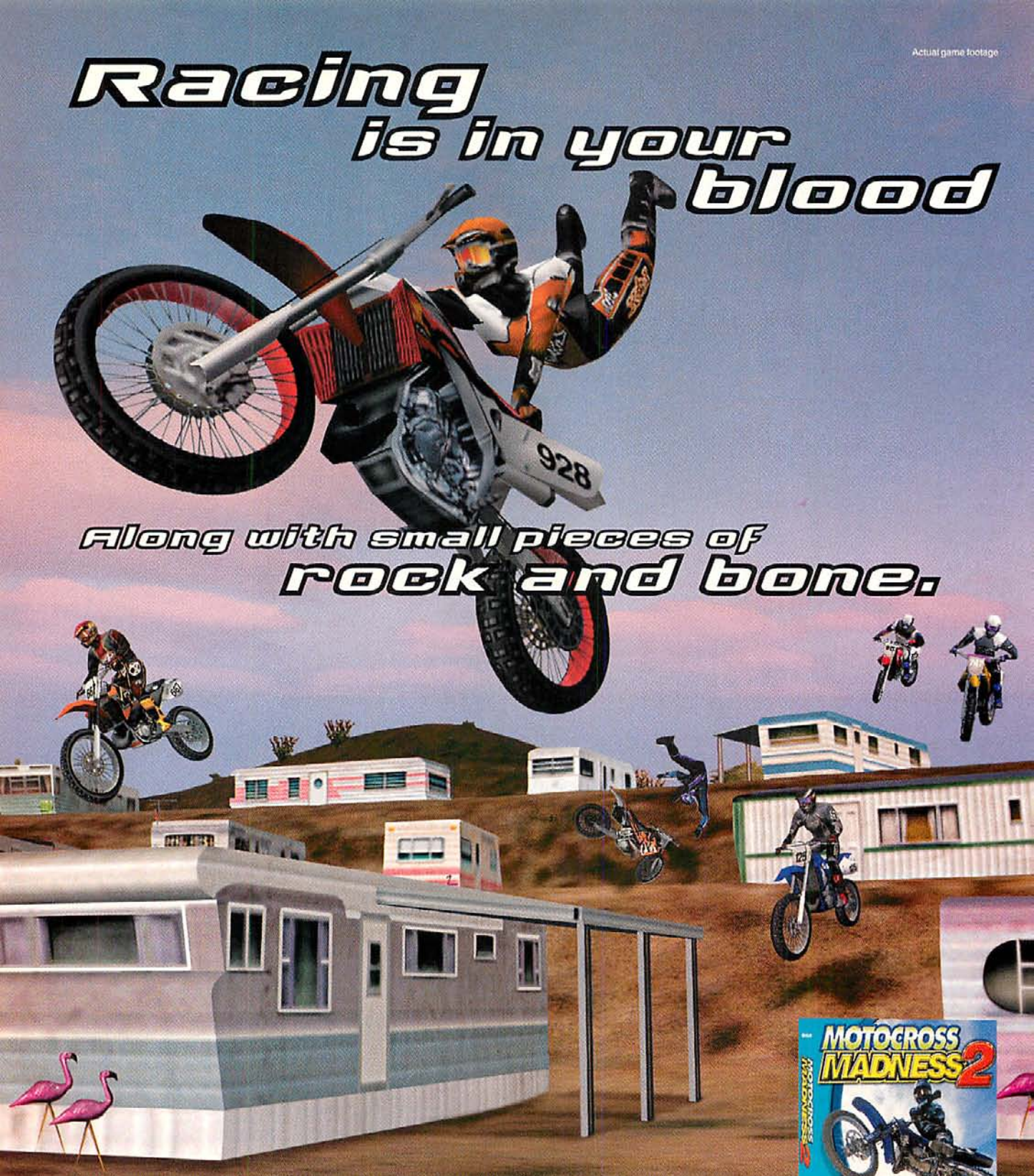
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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD
AUGUST 2000
ISSUE 193
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FOUNDER
RUSSELL SIPE

Back to Basics

If you've been keeping an ear pressed to the rumor mill, you're probably wondering what the hell is going on in the world of computer gaming. G.O.D. sold out (kind of). Peter Molyneaux is getting out of the PC gaming business (not really). Adventure games are dead (not at all). Sims are dead (well...). Microsoft is forsaking sports fans this year (definitely). And, according to the industry buzz, the PlayStation 2, Dreamcast, Dolphin, and X-Box are not only breathing heavily down the PC's neck, they're jeopardizing its very existence as a game platform.

Slow. Down. It's not that bad. Really. It's not. True, the salad days of PC gaming—a time when any business with six zeroes in a bank account could get a PC game in development—have passed us by. And it's also true that last year was far from stellar regarding game releases and sales. But page through this issue, and I think you'll agree with me when I say that the horizon looks much brighter. In fact, with titles like TROPICO, BLACK & WHITE, FREELANCER, CRIMSON SKIES, and HALO coming down the pipes, the next two years could bring the most innovative and entertaining games we've seen in a long while.



While PC games rarely achieve the mega-sales of a hit console title, they consistently deliver innovative and deep gameplay to a relatively small but dedicated audience that values substance over big-budget flash.

The way I think about it, PC gaming occupies a position similar to independent film in a blockbuster-oriented Hollywood. While PC games rarely achieve the mega-sales of a hit console title, they consistently deliver innovative and deep gameplay to a relatively small but dedicated audience that values substance over big-budget flash.

In looking at the heavy emphasis on story-telling, role-playing elements, and genre-blurring in our 6th-annual games roundup, it seems that we're all relearning this fact. Sure, it hasn't come without a cost...as console games like METAL GEAR SOLID and MARIO GOLF picked up on these principles, and as the next-generation systems prepare to battle to the death, dollars have moved from one side of the fence to the other. Many PC titles have perished in the transfer.

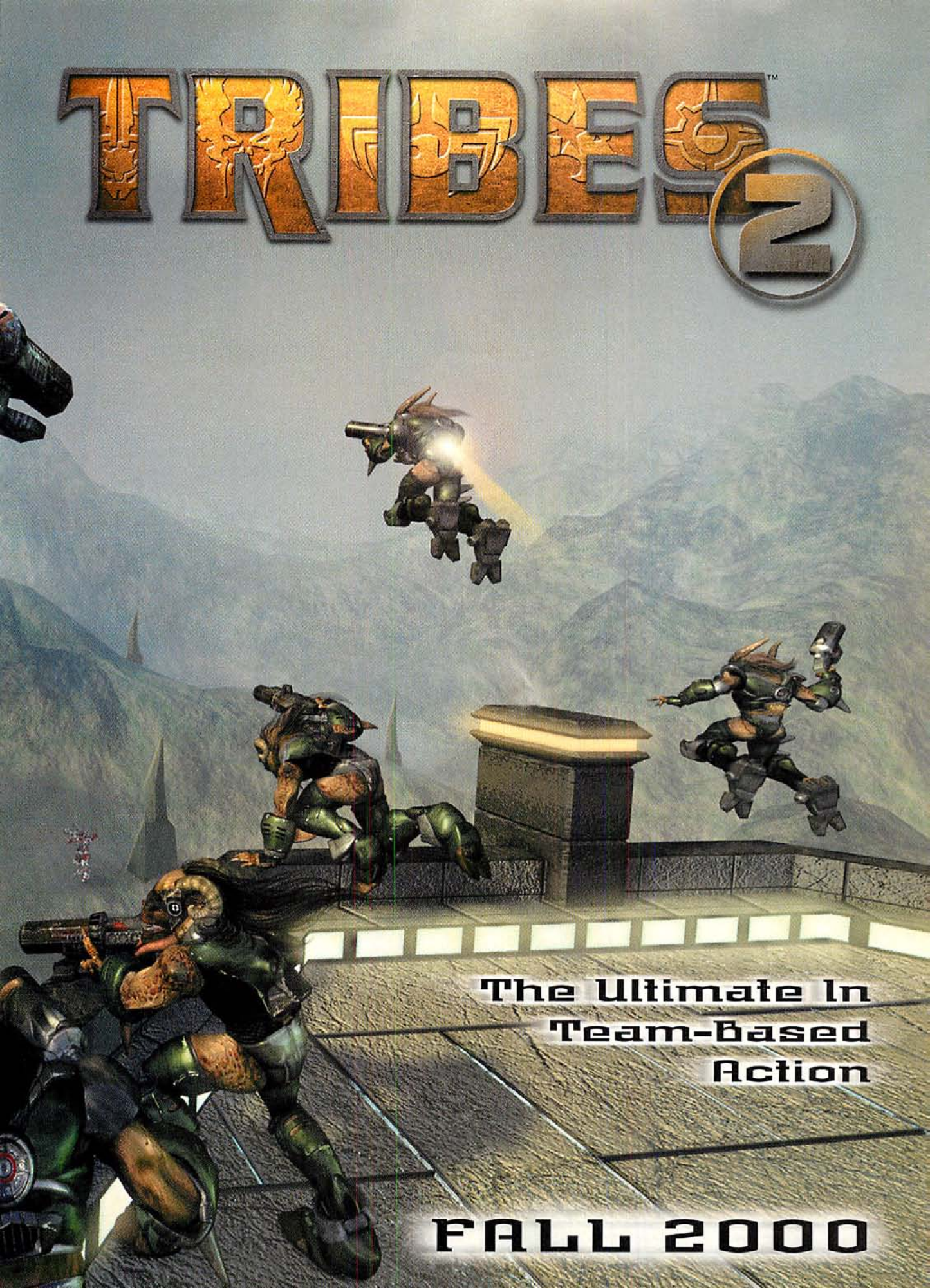
This isn't necessarily a bad thing. Fewer dollars may mean fewer games, but it also means more innovation and less junk on the store shelves. Better games facing less competition means that the good games will sell exceptionally well, the money will start flowing, and the boom-bust cycle that is the PC gaming business will keep on churning.

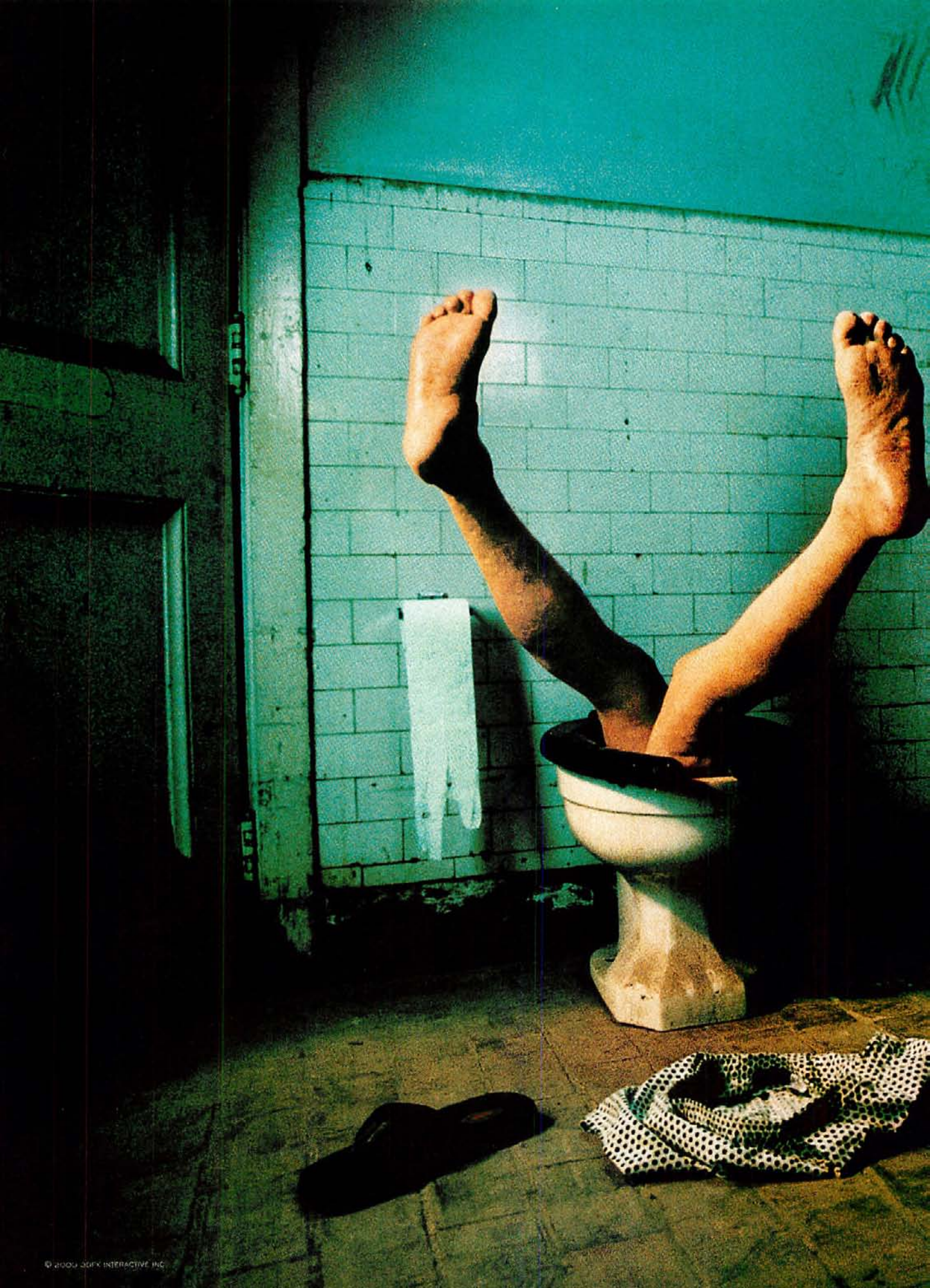
So don't worry about PC gaming. It's not going anywhere. And the next time you hear someone preaching about the demise of PC gaming, or the 12-step program to fix it, remember this: All the fancy talking doesn't change one key fact—success boils down to innovative, narrative-driven, unique gaming experiences. And really nothing else.

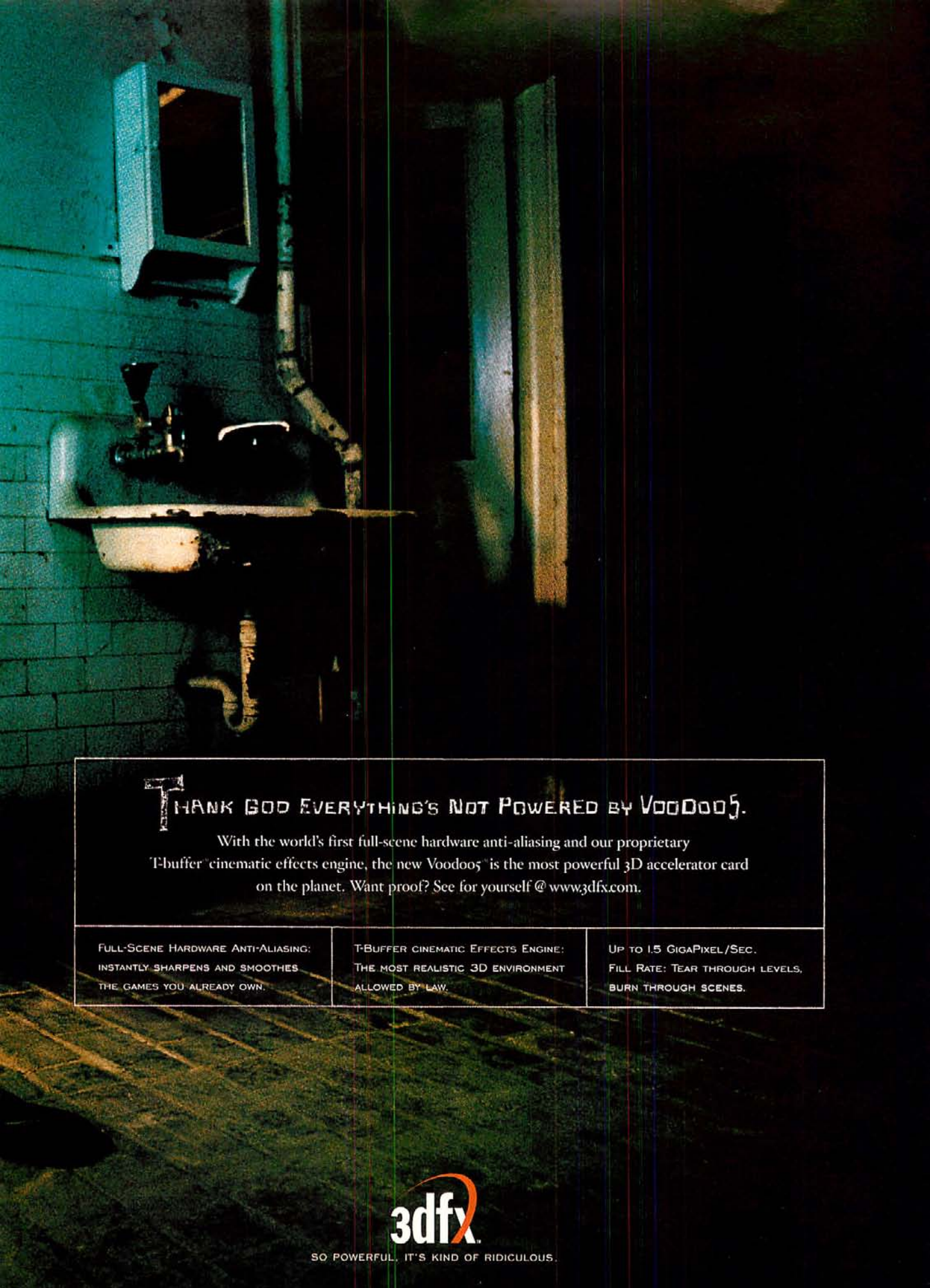
George Jones



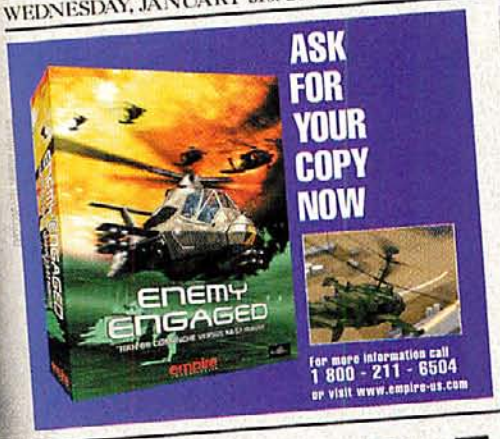
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COMANCHES: TRIAL BY FIRE



THE TIME FOR WAR GAMES IS OVER, HERE COMES THE REAL THING

by LARRY STURGIS War Correspondent

Until now pilots training for combat have relied on a super realistic flight simulation, known as Enemy Engaged. This has two fully simulated, fully armed combat helicopters- US RAH-66 Comanche and Russian Ka-52 Hokum-B

Cockpits - Highly detailed virtual cockpits - views include your co-pilot/gunner, Fly as pilot or gunner, Fully animated crew.

Flight Dynamics - Authentic flight dynamics accurately recreate the individual handling aspects of each helicopter Configuration options available

Systems - Precision avionics and displays, Novice and realistic avionics options, System damage, Authentic weapon Hokum ejector seats!

Real Combat Areas - Lebanon - The US step in to stop production of weapons of mass destruction, Taiwan - Chinese invasion, Yemen - a border war with Saudi Arabia

Real Terrain - Modelled on real digital maps with trees and buildings to hide behind, Vast combat zon Tactical installations (airfields, military bases, etc.), Strate installations (power stations, oil refineries, etc.)

Colonel Burkwitz on the problems facing Taiwan pages 4 and 5

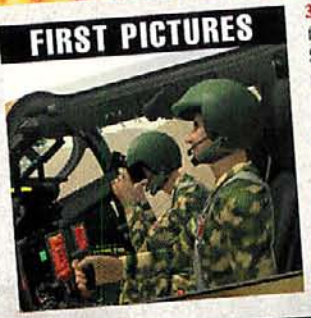


3D Models - 60 + highly detailed and articulated 3D models, both ground, sea and air vehicles.

Missions - Realistic missions, Fly with wingmen and co-ordinate attacks, Radio in air and artillery support, Day, night and all weather missions.

Campaigns - 3 large scale dynamic campaigns, Smaller scale 'skirmish' games, Detailed campaign interface, Three game difficulty levels. Plus those of Apache Havoc if it's installed.

FIRST PICTURES



3D Engine - Specifically designed for low level helicopter combat, Supports 640x480 to 1600x1200 screen resolutions, Supports hardware transform and lighting (T&L).

Multiplayer - Internet, LAN, Serial, Modem.

Compatibility With 'Enemy Engaged: Apache Havoc - If Apache Havoc is installed then you can Fly the Apache and Havoc gunships and Play the Apache Havoc campaigns.

LETTERS

SILENT HUNTER II:
CAN YOU HANDLE THE TRUTH?

■■■ The section concerning the situation with our SILENT HUNTER II project (*Mr. Sneaky*, June issue) was inaccurate, inappropriate, unsubstantiated, and just flat-out wrong.

For the record: Our development agreement with Aeon Electronic Entertainment Inc. was terminated because the developer was in breach of the contract. This project is approaching well over two years late from the originally planned dates in the original agreement. We were very patient and cooperative with Aeon during development of SILENT HUNTER II. We paid advances of royalties that far exceeded the original amounts necessary to finish the project. Our patience ended when they failed to properly deliver a key milestone. We gave them the required time to rectify the breach of contract and they failed to deliver once again, leaving us with no choice but to terminate the agreement, secure the source code, and make other plans for the completion of the project.

As for being in the middle of negotiations with us for a new contract: Untrue. We had just signed an addendum to the contract that provided for additional advances and more time, but they were still unable to complete the major milestones on time. To date, we have paid them advances that far exceed the milestones that have been delivered. There were no "free months of work."

Carl C. Norman
Managing Director, Novato Studio
Entertainment Division, Mattel Interactive

VIOLENCE BEGETS VIOLENCE

■■■ After recently reading Jeff Green's article about the video game violence document by the American Psychological Association, I decided to conduct a study of my own. I took 210 college students and had half of them play QUAKE III for several hours, while I had the other half read a 44-page document by the American Psychological Association's *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Afterward, I had the subjects participate in a "competitive reaction time" contest, in which the loser would receive a "noise blast." My finding was that those who read the 44-page document by the Psychological Association would give longer noise blasts than those who played QUAKE III. This proves that 44-page documents written by the American Psychological Association incite more violence than video games do.

Ben Field



BLOWING THE CALL ON ASHERON'S

A number of readers felt our review of ASHERON'S CALL missed the mark. Here're a few of their comments:

■■■ I was absolutely astonished at the review you gave ASHERON'S CALL! First of all, sticky monsters are not what you think they are. The monsters appear to warp, but in reality they are behind you the whole time. When Turbine created sticky monsters (which only stick if they are faster than you), they didn't have the time to create new animations for them to run and swing at the same time. Once they are done with the new animations, the monsters will no longer warp. As for the combat system, it is a hell of a lot better than EVERQUEST's! ASHERON'S CALL's combat is much easier to use.

Duskrider

■■■ What becomes woefully obvious in this "review" is that Mr. Handy must have spent an absolute minimum amount of time attempting to play the game.

D.C. Arns

■■■ The review of ASHERON'S CALL in the July edition really missed the mark. The only thing that Alex Handy got right is that the world is large, in fact it's huge. Here is a brief list of features that Alex failed to mention:

1. The spell system.
2. Turbine updates the game once a month.
3. Some comment on the skill point and experience system.
4. The Player Killing aspect.
5. The numerous dungeons scattered across the land.

I really don't see how an honest review can be done by just playing ASHERON'S CALL for a short while. I have played since mid-January, and I still haven't seen more than 1/2 of Dereth – the world is that large.

Tim Soltis

AMEN, BROTHER!

■■■ Can you tell me why it is that about 75 percent of the "highly anticipated" games just seem to flop? When I start looking at a game ad that tells me that it's the "game I've been waiting for," I immediately think that it will probably suck. The last few games I have purchased (FINAL FANTASY VIII, NOCTURNE) have had previews that made them look like God himself must have created this 3D engine. I go out and buy these games expecting an experience I will never forget. I couldn't be more wrong. After about four hours playing these games, the shininess of the 3D engine wears off and I find myself with a $50 lump of crap. If people stopped worrying about how good their graphics are, they might actually put some thought into gameplay. I really hope that most of the games that I am looking forward to (ONI, HALO, BLACK & WHITE, DIABLO 2) actually deliver a game that is fun rather than a hyped-up piece of crap.

Cory Delaney

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read.me

The latest news from around the computer gaming world

edited by jeff_green@zd.com



PC or Not PC?

At the Electronic Entertainment Expo, PC gaming plays second fiddle to Sony, Sega, and even...Microsoft

Instead of touting the sequel to the best-selling WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, Disney Interactive might have considered a new title for PC game developers: WHO WANTS TO SELL A MILLION GAMES? Or perhaps Hasbro could have replaced MONOPOLY TYCOON with PC GAME TYCOON, the goal of which would be to resuscitate the sales and enthusiasm in the flagging PC games market.

Walking around the show floor at the Los Angeles Convention center, it was hard *not* to notice the lack of PC enthusiasm on the show floor. Outside of Maxis' SIMS success, commercial hits on the PC have been hard to come by in 2000. As a result, many PC game developers have cut back their plans, or, seeing a huge opportunity with the next-generation console systems, are developing more and more titles for the PlayStation 2, Dreamcast, or X-Box at the expense of PC gamer.

But that's not to say that the next year isn't going to be a good one for computer gamers. Consider the five major trends, all of which were immediately obvious after spending 20 minutes at the show:

1. **The season of the console clan**. The only question is, how long will the season last? With PlayStation 2 machines everywhere, and Sega and Nintendo and Microsoft all vying for show-floor attention, there was little room for any other buzz. For console fans, E3 was an exhilarating rush. Sega spun out a bizarre-but-interesting product line (including SEAMAN and SPACE CHANNEL 5, two total departures for the company), Microsoft relished the role of the underdog with the X-Box, and Nintendo held a press conference to announce what they wouldn't be announcing at



the show (the 32-bit Game Boy Advance).

2. **This is nVidia's town now.** It's amazing how quickly the mighty fall. Two years ago, every PC gaming booth at the show had 3dfx logos stickered all over their monitors and demonstration equipment. This year, it was all about nVidia's GeForce 2. What a difference two years make. (See page 114 for a head-to-head comparison between the two.)

3. **Online gaming—the 2nd wave.** After one aborted attempt, the online game is staging a furious comeback. Spurred by the economic success of ULTIMA ONLINE and EVERQUEST, several top game shops put forth Internet-based games. Raising the most eyebrows in Los Angeles: NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, TRIBES 2, and EA World's monstrous offering, which will include MADDEN and NBA LIVE. And then there's Sierra's TEAM FORTRESS 2, which is undergoing a major change of graphics engine. Even Sega is getting into the act, with PHANTASY STAR ONLINE for the Sega Dreamcast.

4. **PC sports games are on the verge of extinction.** Noticing the absence of any Microsoft sports titles (see Inside Gaming page 133), one EA Sports representative was overheard remarking, "We're the only game in town now." Hopefully next year, gamers will be able to say the same thing.

5. **PC games are being reinvented.** One of the bright spots of the show—and perhaps the saving grace for PC game enthusiasts—was the lack of emphasis on clones. From Maxis' SIMS titles to BLACK AND WHITE to the over-the-top ambition of HALO, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, SIGMA, and FREELANCER, game-makers appear to finally be picking up on gamers' desires for original, innovative experiences.

While the next 12 to 18 months are going to be critical for the industry, the years 2000 and 2001 could be the most interesting and entertaining ever for PC gamers.

—George Jones

more E3 Coverage on page 35

CGW'S TOP 10 GAMES OF E3

GAME OF THE SHOW

1. Halo (Bungie)

2. Black & White (Bullfrog/Electronic Arts)
3. Max Payne (Remedy/Gathering of Developers)
4. Neverwinter Nights (Bioware/Interplay)
5. Sigma (Relic/Microsoft)
6. WarCraft III (Blizzard)
7. B-17 (Wayward Design/Hasbro)
8. Escape From Monkey Island (LucasArts)
9. Tropico (PopTop/Gathering of Developers)
10. NASCAR 4 (Papyrus/Sierra)

Tchotchke of the Month

Tchotch·ke (choch'ke). Slang, from Yiddish: a cheap, showy trinket.

Mother of God, what was Interplay thinking? Sending a petri dish loaded with crusty living bacteria to promote EVOLVA—can't they see the incredible redundancy in actually delivering bacteria to gaming editors? They could have sent us clean dishes and a swab, cut out the middleman, and gotten the same result.

But the mildly smelly EVOLVA dishes have found one fan in the *CGW* office—Copy Editor Holly Fleming has fashioned a delightful medallion and earring ensemble. Vaguely disturbing? You betcha, but it's worth its weight in the flies it draws just for the terrified stares the utterly unfashionable accessories draw from the civilians in our office building's elevator.





The GOOD...

MDK2

We've only just started playing this action game from Bioware, but we already like what we see. Beautiful engine, unique gameplay, and large doses of oddball humor. Whatever they're smoking up in Edmonton, we'd like a kilo.



The BAD...

APPLE IGNORES E3

Yeah, they sure are committed to the games market, huh? That's what they've been saying on and off for, what, 16 years now? Too bad they're basically lying about it. If they cared, they might want to actually help developers make games for the Mac platform. They might actively encourage PC games to get ported within two years of shipping. And they might want to show up at the biggest gaming event in the world. Just a thought.



and the UGLY

LOOKING GLASS SHATTERED

It doesn't get much uglier than this. Looking Glass, one of the most innovative, brainiest developers in the biz shut its doors due to financial difficulty. Doesn't really matter who or what is to blame for this. All we know is, when a company that puts out games as deep and fun as ULTIMA UNDERWORLD and THIEF has to go under, it's a sad day indeed. R.I.P.



MARATHON fans rejoice! A group called Team Unpfhorgiven is working on an UNREAL TOURNAMENT mod called MARATHON: RESURRECTION that will recreate Bungie's classic Mac gaming experience with the UT engine. Check out www.planetunreal.com/marathon/.

Looking Glass Shuts Down

On May 24th the employees of Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Looking Glass Studios were told that the development house was closing due to financial problems. The closing affected more than 60 employees who were given the day to clean out their desks. Looking Glass was one of the more renowned development groups, having developed ULTIMA UNDERWORLD for Origin, the FLIGHT UNLIMITED series, TERRA NOVA, and the popular THIEF series. The closure means that projects in progress such as THIEF III, JANE'S ATTACK SQUADRON, and "Deep Cover" (working title for a modern-day stealth game), will likely never be made.

According to a Looking Glass employee who wanted to remain anonymous, Looking Glass was "...cash-starved and running out of short-term capital." According to the employee, their troubles began some time ago when they underbid on some projects to land contracts, and then had cost overruns that weren't covered by the publisher advances. "We didn't scale back our ambitions," said the employee.

Then last fall, Irrational Games, a spinoff of Looking Glass that helped them develop SYSTEM SHOCK 2, pulled out of the "Deep Cover" project to work with Crave on a PS2 game. This, in turn, let the publisher—allegedly Microsoft—exercise an option to pull out of the deal as well. The result was that Looking Glass' short-term cash flow dried up.

Looking Glass' final hope hinged upon being purchased by Eidos. But Eidos, with their own financial problems of late, decided they couldn't afford the deal, so the purchase fell through. Looking Glass, in debt and with no short-term relief in sight, had no choice but to shut down. Now the creditors own the rights to the THIEF franchise.

"Looking Glass was '...cash-starved and running out of short-term capital.'"

This unfortunate sequence of events underscores the difficulties that developers have to face these days. "The independent developer lives hand to mouth and on the whim of the publisher," the Looking Glass employee said. "The sad thing about Looking Glass is that many of the employees put their whole adulthood into making Looking Glass what it is." And what it is, or was, is a game company that has produced some of the best and most memorable games in the history of the industry. They will be sorely missed. —*Mark Asher*

first look

MASTER OF ORION 3 at Last

Hasbro revives one of the great PC strategy series

One of the surprises at this year's E3 was Hasbro Interactive's announcement that MASTER OF ORION 3 was in development, which surely cheered the hearts of strategy gamers. MOO3 is being developed by Quicksilver, who worked on STARFLEET COMMAND and INVICTUS for Interplay.

Quicksilver wants to retain all the elements that made the first two games so popular—such as spying and diplomacy—but add more of an emphasis on story and character development. Alan Emrich, the lead designer (and former *CGW* strategy games editor!) talked about this aspect of MOO3: "I can't think of another 4X (Explore, Exploit, Expand, Exterminate) game that's really tried to keep a player's role in focus and try to set (and keep) to the story. You're wading through a certain specific (and dramatic) piece of Orion history in MASTER OF ORION III. It's not just a generic jumble of interchangeable game design concepts, created to be completely generic and schlepped off only to those who love to tinker. In MOO3 we strive to answer the actor's eternal question each turn, 'What's my motivation?'"



Emrich says that the game will feature many new elements, including the addition of domestic politics. "If there is instability in the air, revolution at home can ensue. This could cause anything from political gridlock, to unrest and revolution in the provinces, to a civil war and the Empire torn asunder." According to Emrich, other new features include "...governments changing; the rise, spread, and decline of religions; personal corruption and treachery; a whole new approach to Events; and a lot more."

The combat in MOO3 is likely the most controversial aspect of this game. Although the general gameplay is turn-based, the combat takes place in real-time, but Emrich promises this will be manageable. "We've moved the scale up a level. Space Battles in MOO3 have a higher level of maneuverability than the individual ship. Ships are combined into Task Forces, and these combat groupings are the units of maneuver. So instead of commanding, say, 235 ships, you might have a dozen Task Forces (and twelve is a lot easier to manage than 235)."

Another new concept is imperial focus. "Imperial Focus represents the Leader's ability to get things done within the time scale being simulated. The Leader can only 'push' so many programs, make so many speeches, attend so many summits, and so on. When you're busy flogging the workers to get the Death Star done on time, you're not micromanaging the moisture harvest on Tatooine. With Imperial Focus, the player can do anything, but not everything, on a given turn."

Quicksilver has been working on MOO3 for six months, and they hope to have it finished next year. This is definitely a game that we'll continue to cover as development progresses. Now, if only we could convince Hasbro Interactive to get to work on a sequel to MASTER OF MAGIC... —*Mark Asher*

PC or Not PC? (continued)

5 Biggest Disappointments of E3

1. Oni (Bungie): The news that Bungie removed ONI's multiplayer component due to insurmountable problems was like getting kicked in the stomach by Konoko. A fighting game with no multiplayer? Doh!

2. Obi-Wan (LucasArts): Was it us, or did the game really look that dull? At least they didn't show us Jar Jar.

3. FAKK 2 (Ritual/Gathering of Developers): It still looks gorgeous, but how's this for pointless: They removed the adult material from a game based on an adult license (*Heavy Metal* magazine)—and then wound up with a Mature ESRB rating anyway.



Best Booth Babe of E3

As usual, E3 was crammed full of scantily-clad, silicone-enhanced, mall-tanned females shamelessly hired by game companies to entice males to their booths. But by far, the most popular female of the show—and our favorite as well—was the diminutive, fully-clothed gaming wunderwoman Kornelia Takacs, a 22-year old from Budapest, who, for three days, sat at the GameSpy booth and utterly humiliated nearly every male dumb enough to challenge her in one-on-one QUAKE 3 deathmatches. Matches were set to either five minutes, or seven frags—whichever came first.

Check out these measurements, boys: 1,566-23-2

1,566: total frags

23: total times killed

2: total matches lost (once 4-2, once 2-0)

Most Innovative Game of E3

Sigma (Relic/Microsoft): Relic wowed the gaming world with their first game, HOMEWORLD, and they look like they'll do it again with this truly offbeat strategy game that involves, um, creating mutant hybrid animals.

4. Legends of Might and Magic (New World Computing/3DO): 3DO continues to shove Might and Magic products down our throats with no letup. Uncle, already.

5. Loose Cannon (Microsoft): This auto-combat game has been kicking around for a couple years now, and isn't looking better with age. Back to the engine shop?

Reality Check

	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Incite	Gamespot	Gamecenter	Average
Soldier of Fortune	C-	A-	B+	C+	B	B+	B
Superbike 2000	A+	A-	A	A+	A-	B+	A
High Heat 2001	A+	A	B+	A+	A-	B+	A
Star Wars: Force Commander	D	D	C	C	*	D-	C-
Thief II: The Metal Age	A	A-	A	B+	A-	B+	A-
Nox	B-	A-	B+	B+	B+	B+	B+
Majesty	B+	B+	C-	*	A-	B+	B
F/A-18E Super Hornet	C	C+	*	*	C	B-	C+
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2000	B-	D+	B-	*	B-	B+	B-
MindRover	C	A-	B+	*	B+	*	B+

And the Winner Is... 3DO's HIGH HEAT 2001, EA Sports' SUPERBIKE 2000, and—notably—Looking Glass' THIEF II. Yet another critically loved game, and still Looking Glass has to shut its doors. It's a damn shame. No real stinkers this month, except for STAR WARS: FORCE COMMANDER, whose C- average is about on par with the *Episode One* movie.

*** indicates game has not been rated**

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15

August 1985

We called it the "ultimate game machine." It was the Amiga, and it was going to revolutionize gaming. And it sure did. The graphics and sound capabilities of the Amiga dramatically raised our expectations for game presentation. Sadly, the Amiga's reign was short, due to inept marketing and the manifest destiny of the PC, but we will never forget our flashy "friend."



10

August 1990

The issue of adult content in gaming was beginning to rear its head. The eloquent Johnny Wilson issued a charge worth repeating: "While we need to reach the point where computer game design is not bound by fear of vigilante vigilance over the transgression of straitjacketed virtue and reduced to the lowest common denominator, we still need to find a balance between what is meaningful and what is gratuitous." Amen, Brother Wilson.



5

August 1995

It was a completely different gaming world just five years ago. In our annual Fall games roundup, adventure games were king, the air was thick with hardcore flight sims, and turn-based strategy games were enjoying their last days of glory before the meteorite of real-time strategy games hit the following year. Check out this year's Fall roundup on page 58 and see how the world has turned.



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News & Notes... Wargame mania: Matrix Games announced that over 6,000 downloads of their free 300MB STEEL PANTHERS: WORLD AT WAR game (see Inside Gaming, page 135) were recorded in the first 48 hours.

Id's Bombshell: Next Game a DOOM Remake

Gaming's classic shooter to get a 21st century facelift

John Carmack made two stunning announcements in his .plan file on May 31st. The first was that id is going to remake DOOM as their next project, fulfilling the wishes of many avid gamers. Two of id's owners, Kevin Cloud and Adrian Carmack, were against rehashing DOOM, but other id employees, including John Carmack, found the pull of revisiting that classic game to be irresistible and staged a revolt. Here's Carmack from his .plan file: "An ultimatum was issued to Kevin and Adrian (who control >50% of the company): We are working on DOOM for the next project unless you fire us." Adrian Carmack and Cloud agreed, but the soap opera wasn't over yet.

Some time after the process of hiring new staff to work on DOOM began, artist Paul Steed was fired by Adrian Carmack and Cloud. John Carmack claimed that this was done "in retaliation, over my opposition." Carmack added that "Paul

first look

DRAGON'S LAIR 3D

The Circle Is Complete

In Los Angeles, Blue Byte Software unveiled DRAGON'S LAIR 3D, a third-person-perspective game featuring the first animated video-game star, Dirk the Daring. Unique, cartoon-style 3D graphics and the reincarnation of many of the bad guys from the original Laser Disc coin-op game complement what actually looks to be a solid action-adventure. DRAGON'S LAIR 3D is due in October 2001.



Connectix Corporation's PlayStation emulator software, Virtual Game Station, is available for both the PC and Mac directly from their Web site at www.virtualgamestation.com.



has certainly done things in the past that could be grounds for dismissal, but this was retaliatory for him being among the 'conspirators.' I happen to think Paul was damn good at his job, and that he was going to be one of the most valuable contributors to DOOM."

John Carmack discouraged any attempts at interviews about the new DOOM game in his .plan file, but he did say that the new game will be "focusing on the single-player game experience, and using brand new technology in almost every aspect of it."

On June 2, Kevin Cloud offered his side of the Steed firing in his .plan file. "Although Adrian and I alone made the decision to fire Paul, it is the general opinion among the rest of id that we made the right decision. Paul was not fired as a result of his support for DOOM. Other people at id supported DOOM in the exact same manner. For several reasons, it was time for id software and Paul Steed to part company. This should have no reflection on Paul's talent as an artist. It goes without saying that he is one of the best modeler/animators in the gaming business."

Look for *CGW* to stay on top of this fascinating news and to cover the development of DOOM as the story keeps breaking.

Retro Gaming Revolution

Our inner Pac Man grows up

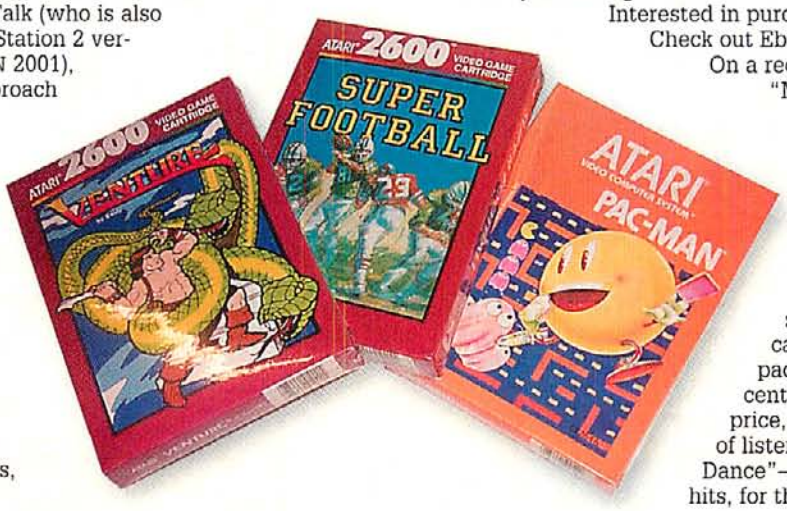
■■■ "I equate the early computer games of the 70's and 80's to the movies of the late 1800's and early 1900's," explains Hugh Falk, curator of the Gaming Obsession Through Computer History Association virtual museum (GOTCHA). "Today's most primitive games will become next century's classics—I started GOTCHA because I wanted to preserve the classics."

Falk isn't alone in his wishes. In synch with retro-'80s pop music nostalgia, retro-gaming—long confined to fan sites based around Commodore 64, Apple II, and Atari emulators—has started to pick up momentum and become more sophisticated as the first generation of gamers begins to bond over their shared memories of digital greatness.

GOTCHA, a PC-oriented Hall Of Fame begun in March by Falk (who is also working on the PlayStation 2 version of EA's MADDEN 2001), takes a different approach towards induction than most magazines and Web sites. "Many magazines and sites have a Top 50 or Top 100 list, but I was never completely satisfied with the results," he argues. "I wanted to do something more like the Academy Awards, so I categorized the games by year and by genre. And the winners are chosen by a committee of six." (*CGW* Editor-in-Chief George Jones is one of the panelists). As an example, the 1987 winners include EARL WEAVER BASEBALL, PIRATES!, DUNGEON MASTER, MANIAC MANSION, and TETRIS.

Another retro-oriented effort is *Classic Gamer Magazine* (**www.classicgamer.com**), a high-quality fanzine based in San Diego and run by Editor-in-Chief Chris Cavanaugh. CGM offers up some lively discourse on everything from the Atari 2600 to the original NES to the earliest home computer games.

In the latest Spring 2000 issue, for example, classic enthusiasts can read about ADVENTURE for the Atari 2600, and a great nostalgia-inducing walkthrough of the early ULTIMA games.



Interested in purchasing the classics? Check out Ebay (**www.ebay.com**). On a recent visit, typing in "Maniac Mansion" resulted in 22 different auctions of various versions of this LucasArts' classic. Atari-heads can check out **www.atariclassic.com**, where you can buy originally-packaged titles for 80 cents apiece. At that price, it beats the heck out of listening to "Safety Dance"—or any other '80s pop hits, for that matter.



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pipeline

We know that game developers tend to use dartboards when determining release dates, so we broke out with even bigger dartboards for the Pipeline. Sometimes, we'll nail the release down to the month, other times we'll give the developers some breathing room by using a general season. Also, we'll highlight some of the more notable releases and pass some preliminary judgement on them before the real reviews are written. Lastly, if you're a publisher, make sure you tell us where your darts have been hitting so that we're not completely blind, okay? Send notices to: cgwpipeline@zd.com

August Releases



DEUS EX: SYSTEM SHOCK fans will greatly appreciate this latest project from Warren Spector. While the paranoia/conspiracy-drenched spy story makes for interesting atmosphere, it's the multiple-solutions-to-puzzles gameplay that grabs us.



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE–REDEMPTION: The Storyteller mode looks great. But we're a little concerned with some of the single-player elements, namely level- and monster-design. Still, the Nihilistic guys made JEDI KNIGHT, so they have a damn good chance of overcoming these hurdles.



SHOGUN: This game has amazing potential. A fun turn-based model underlying a fantastic real-time battle engine. It's like playing those battle scenes in *Ran*. But, there are bugs. Horrible, horrible bugs. We hope the game will conquer the bugs, but the opposite has a distinct chance of happening.

	THEY SAY	WE SAY
4 x 4 Evolution G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Age Of Empires II Expansion Microsoft	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
American McGee's Alice EA	Winter 2000	December 2000
Anachronox Eidos	March 2000	September 2000
Arcanum Sierra	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
NEW B-17 Flying Fortress Hasbro	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn Interplay	Summer 2000	September 2000
Battle Of Britain Rowan Software	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Battle Realms Crave Entertainment	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
Black & White EA	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Blair Witch Project(s) G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
NEW Civilization: Call To Power 2 Activision	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
UPDATE Clive Barker's Undying EA	Winter 2000	November 2000
NEW Close Combat: Utah Beach Mattel	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Combat Flight Simulator 2 Microsoft	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Comanche vs. Hokum Empire	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2 Westwood	Winter 2000	November 2000
NEW Command & Conquer: Renegade Westwood	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
UPDATE Commandos 2 Eidos	Winter 2000	November 2000
Conquest: Frontier Wars Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
UPDATE Crimson Skies Microsoft	Summer 2000	September 2000
Dark Reign 2 Activision	Summer 2000	August 2000
NEW Destroyer Command Mattel	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Diablo II Blizzard	July 2000	August 2000
Dreamland Chronicles: Freedom Ridge Bethesda	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Duke Nukem Forever 3D Realms	Who Knows?	December 2000
Dungeon Siege Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
NEW Elder Scrolls: Morrowind Bethesda	Winter 2001	Winter 2001
Empire Earth Sierra	Spring 2001	Summer 2001
NEW Escape From Monkey Island LucasArts	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
Evil Dead: Hail To The King THQ	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Fly! II G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Freelancer Microsoft	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Giants: Citizen Kabuto Interplay	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Good & Evil GT	Who knows?	Possibly canned
UPDATE Halo Bungie	Winter 2000	January 2001
UPDATE Harpoon 4 Hasbro	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2 G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
NEW Hitman: Code 47 Eidos	Summer 2000	September 2000
Homeworld: Cataclysm Sierra	Spring 2000	September 2000
UPDATE I'm Going In Eidos	Fall 2000	October 2000
Kingdom Under Fire G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
NEW Legends Of Might & Magic 3DO	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Loose Cannon Microsoft	Winter 2000	Winter 2000

	THEY SAY	WE SAY
NEW Magic & Mayhem 2: The Art Of Magic Bethesda	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
Max Payne G.O.D.	Winter 2000	February 2001
UPDATE MechCommander 2 Microsoft	Spring 2001	Summer 2001
MechWarrior 4 Microsoft	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
NEW Metal Gear Solid PC Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Need for Speed: Motor City Electronic Arts	Winter 2000	???
Neverwinter Nights Interplay	April 2001	Summer 2001
NEW No One Lives Forever Fox	Winter 2000	December 2000
Oni Bungie	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Pool Of Radiance II SSI	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
UPDATE Praetorians Eidos	Spring 2000	March 2001
Reach for the Stars Mattel	Summer 2000	July 2000
NEW Red Faction THQ	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
Return To Wolfenstein Activision	November 2000	Q1 2001
Rune G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Sanity Monolith	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Settlers IV Blue Byte	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
UPDATE Sid Meier's Civilization III Hasbro	Summer 2001	Fall 2001
NEW Sid Meier's Dinosaur! EA	Winter 2001	Winter 2001
NEW Sigma Microsoft	Summer 2001	Fall 2001
UPDATE Silent Hunter II SSI	Winter 2000	Summer 2001
SimMars EA	Fall 2000	Spring 2001
NEW SimsVille EA	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
UPDATE Sovereign Sony Online	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
NEW Squad Leader Hasbro	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Star Trek Deep Space 9: The Fallen Simon & Schuster	August 2000	Q4 2000
NEW Startopia Eidos	Winter 2000	November 2000
Star Wars Episode I: Obi-Wan LucasArts	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
NEW Sudden Strike CDV	Fall 2000	September 2000
Summoner THQ	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Team Fortress 2 Sierra	Summer 2000	Christmas
The Longest Journey FunCom	Summer 2000	Winter 2000
The Real Neverending Story Discreet Monsters	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
NEW The World Is Not Enough EA	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Throne Of Darkness Sierra	Summer 2000	Winter 2000
Tribes 2 Sierra	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
NEW Tropico G.O.D.	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
UPDATE WarCraft III Blizzard	Spring 2001	Summer 2001
NEW Warlords IV Mattel	Spring 2001	Spring 2001
Warlords: Battlecry Mattel	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
NEW Waterloo Breakaway Games	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
NEW Wizards & Warriors Activision	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Zeus: Master Of Olympus Sierra	Fall 2000	September 2000

Top 40

CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

This Month	Last Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Half-Life** Havas	5
2	2	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
3	5	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
4	3	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4
5	4	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas	5
6	16	**The Sims** Electronic Arts	5
7	6	**Quake III Arena** Activision	3.5
8	10	**Homeworld** Havas	4.5
9	7	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
10	13	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas	3.5
11	14	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
12	11	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
13	12	**Heroes of Might & Magic III** 3DO	4.5
14	8	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
15	19	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
16	9	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
17	22	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
18	21	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
19	17	**SimCity 3000** Electronic Arts	4
20	23	**Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun** Electronic Arts	4
21	15	**Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast** Interplay	4
22	18	**Roller Coaster Tycoon** Hasbro	4
23	20	**Final Fantasy VIII** Eidos	2
24	24	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
25	25	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
26	34	**Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed** Electronic Arts	4.5
27	30	**Soldier of Fortune** Activision	2.5
28	37	**Thief 2** Eidos	4.5
29	28	**Age of Empires: Rise of Rome** Microsoft	4
30	26	**Worms Armageddon** Hasbro	4
31	35	**FIFA 2000** Electronic Arts	4.5
32	31	**EverQuest** Sony	4
33	27	**Railroad Tycoon II** G.O.D.	4.5
34	29	**Total Annihilation: Core Contingency** Cavedog	4.5
35	38	**Dungeon Keeper II** Electronic Arts	4.5
36	33	**Nox** Westwood	3.5
37	32	**NHL 2000** Electronic Arts	3.5
38	40	**Jagged Alliance 2** TalonSoft	4.5
39	36	**Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade** 3DO	4.5
40	39	**Civilization: Call to Power** Activision	3.5

NEW POLLING PLACE!

Vote in the Top 40 Games poll at *www.computergaming.com.* The more people who vote, the better the results, but please vote only once per month.

HOMEWORLD, THE SIMS, and PLANESCAPE: TORMENT are making slow but steady moves up the charts, but seemingly nothing other than an act of God will shake HALF-LIFE from its lofty perch high above the rest of gamingdom. An act of God or, perhaps, an act of the other guy, that DIABLO dude, who is scheduled to make a run at gaming immortality this Fall. BALDUR'S GATE 2 may have something to say about the matter as well.

Top Action Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Half-Life** Havas	5
2	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
3	**Quake III Arena** id/Activision	4.5
4	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
5	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas	3.5

Top Adventure/RPG Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4.5
2	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
3	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
4	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
5	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5

Top Simulations Games

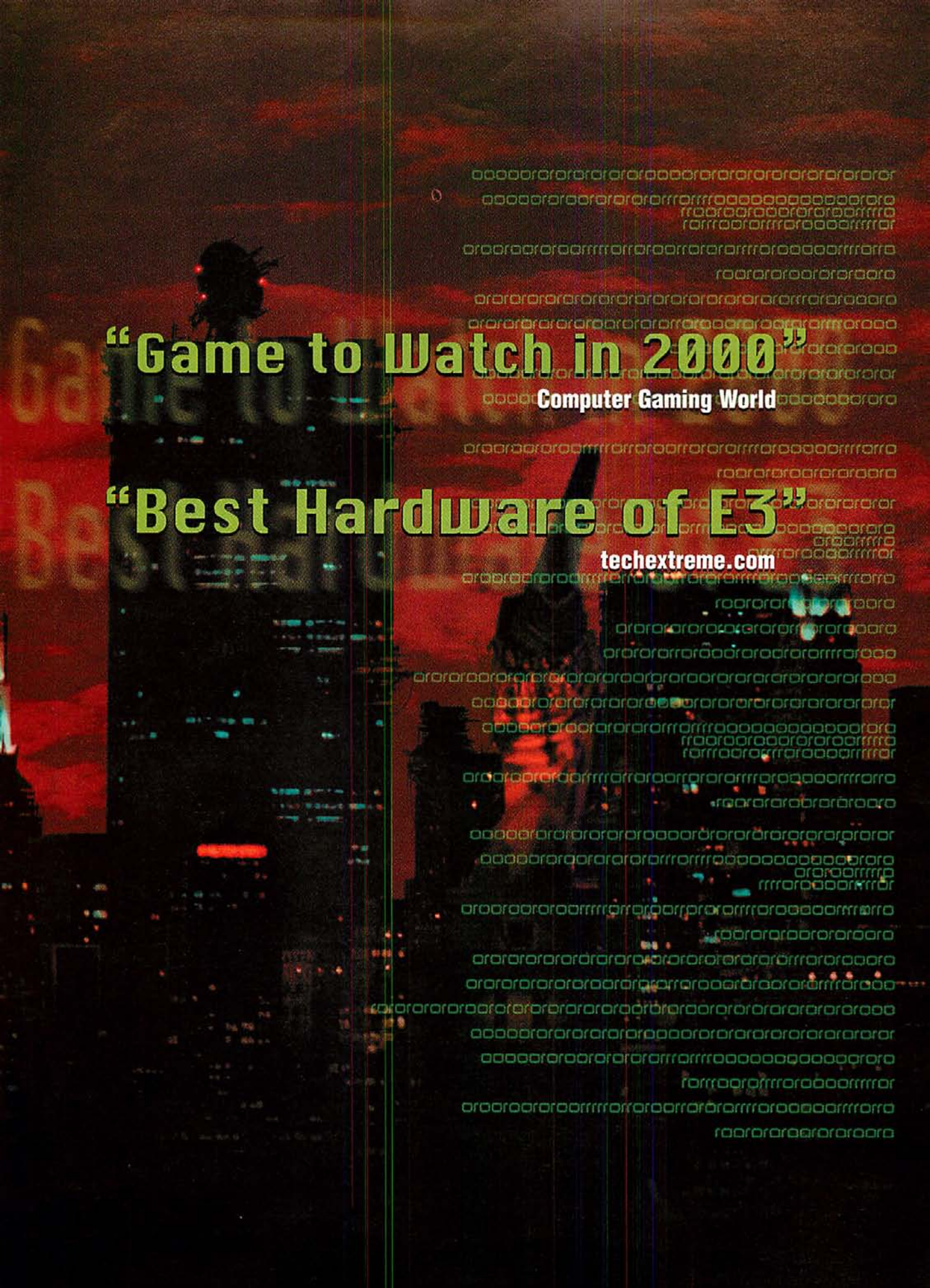
This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
2	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
3	**Falcon 4.0** Hasbro	3.5
4	**European Air War** Hasbro	4
5	**World War II Fighters** Electronic Arts	4.5

Top Sports/Racing Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed** Electronic Arts	4.5
2	**FIFA 2000** EA Sports	4.5
3	**NHL 2000** EA Sports	3
4	**NBA Live 2000** EA Sports	5
5	**Midtown Madness** Microsoft	4

Top Strategy/War Games

This Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
2	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas	5
3	**Homeworld** Havas	4.5
4	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
5	**Heroes of Might & Magic III** 3DO	4.5

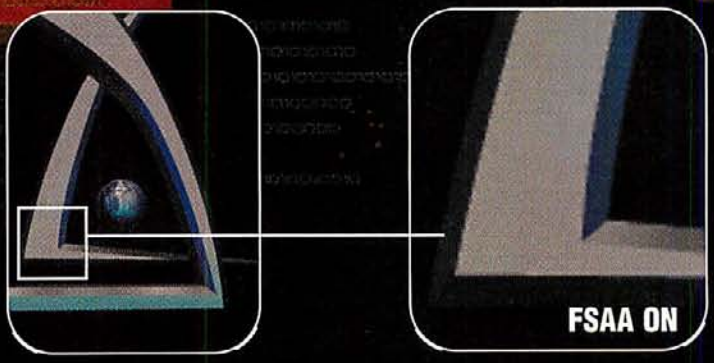

"Game to Watch in 2000"
Computer Gaming World
"Best Hardware of E3"
techextreme.com

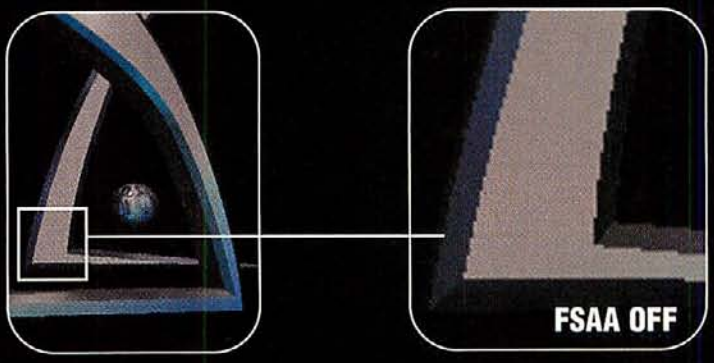
CIVILIZATION IS NEAR COLLAPSE

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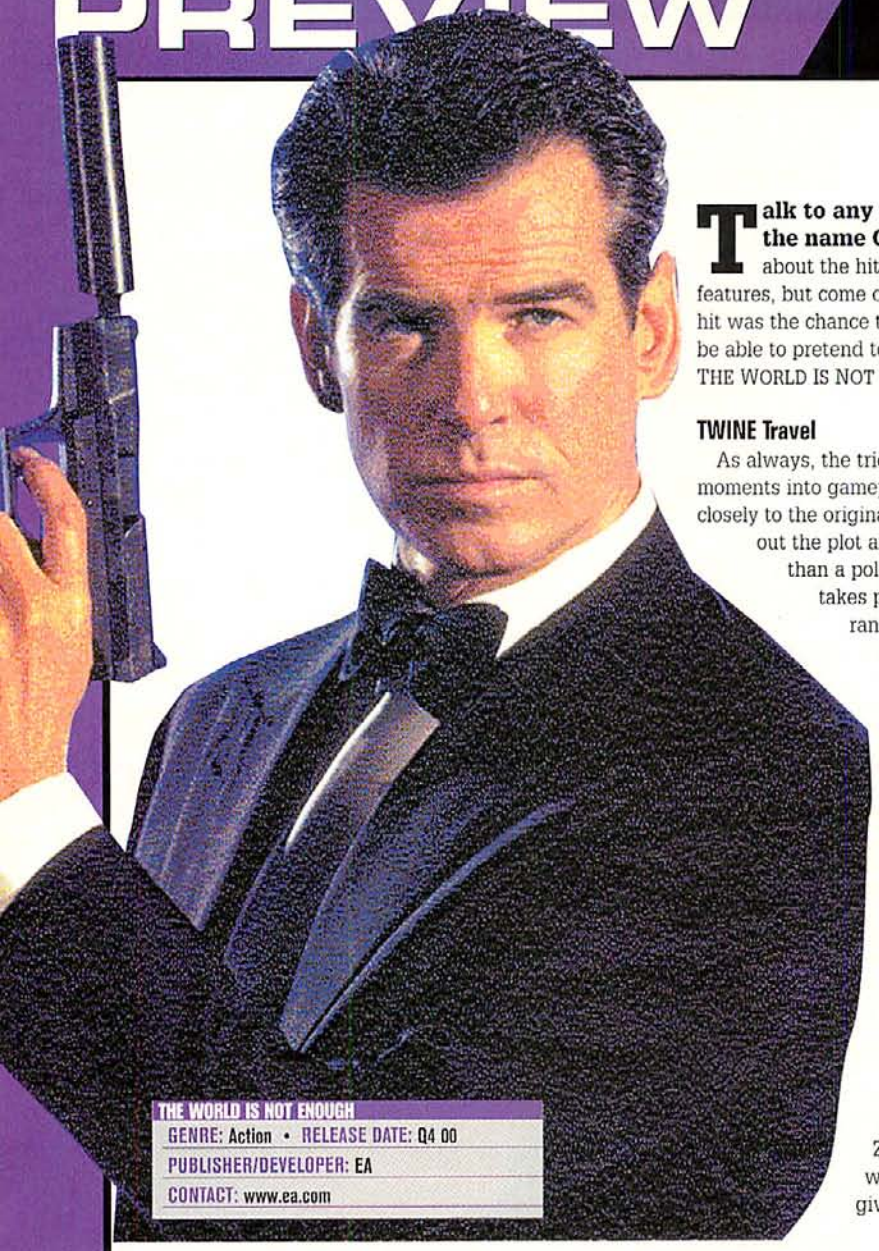
EXCEPT THE POWER OF VOODOO 5





DEUS EX

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THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH
GENRE: Action • RELEASE DATE: Q4 00
PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: EA
CONTACT: www.ea.com

The World Is Not Enough

Who's the best Bond? Connery, Brosnan, or You?

by Thierry Nguyen

Talk to any gamer who owns a Nintendo 64. Inevitably, the name GOLDENEYE will pop up. People will gush on and on about the hit-detection, the multiplayer, the sniper zoom and other features, but come on! Deep down inside, what drew gamers into that 1996 hit was the chance to play Bond. James Bond. Well, PC gamers will finally be able to pretend to be the one true Bond when Electronic Arts rolls out THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH this fall.

TWINE Travel

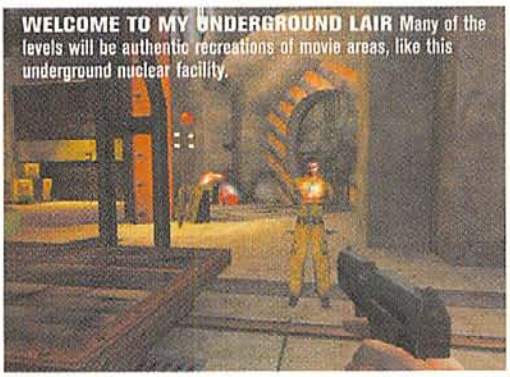
As always, the tricky part of adapting a film is how you turn cinematic moments into gameplay. THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH will be sticking quite closely to the original movie, but EA is adding tweaks and balances to flesh out the plot and to make the experience feel like a real game, rather than a polygonal version of the movie. Mission-wise, the game takes place over the course of 14 missions, with locations ranging from the Caucasus Mountains to Zukovsky's casino to Renards' runaway submarine at the end.

Just because this Bond adventure uses the QUAKE III ARENA engine doesn't mean you'll be running and gunning with a shaken martini in your hand. Ric Neil, the game's producer, pushes the point. "We've enhanced the film's most exciting and intense action scenes that lend themselves well to gameplay." The best example is a level set at the casino. In the film, Bond questions Zukovsky and then sees Elektra King lose a lot of money. In the game, you'll have to come up with the money to pay off Zukovsky in order to get the information you need; how you get the money is up to you. You can sneak around the entire Casino and break into Zukovsky's office, or you can play a winning round of Black Jack (with the help of some handy X-Ray glasses). Another option the team is trying to implement is allowing Bond to use his X-Ray glasses to "see" that Zukovsky's safe combination is being carried by a woman. Then, in true Bond style, you'll seduce her into giving you the combination.

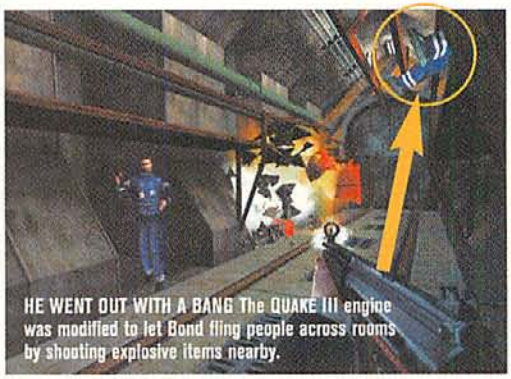
"This is a level where there're no weapons or inane jumping," explains Neil. "This is where the gamer feels like he's playing Bond, rather than a QUAKE mod with Bond music in the background."

Boys, Toys...You Know the Drill

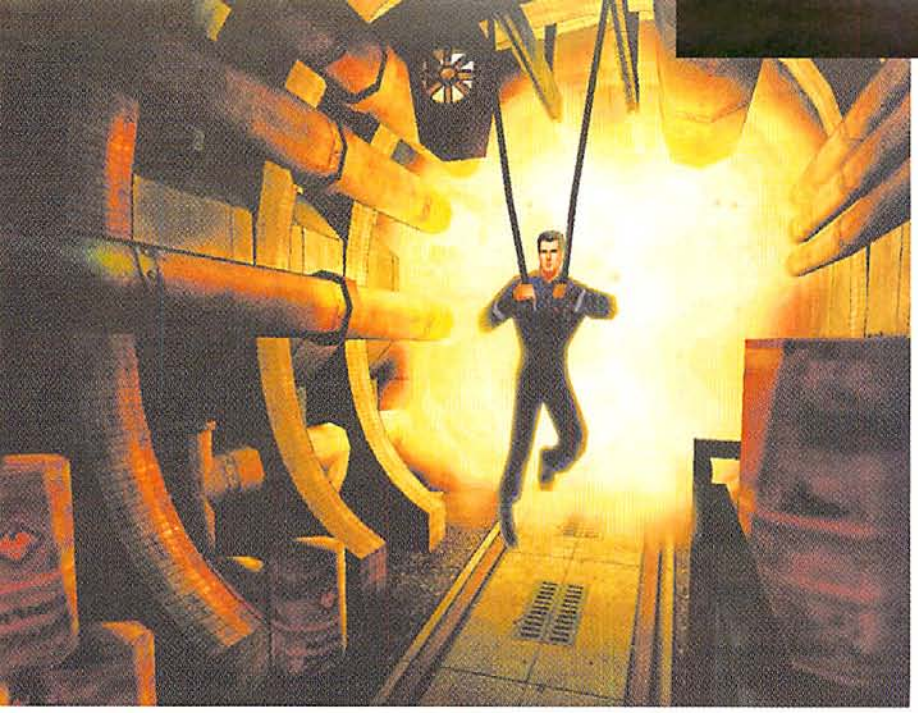
Another signature Bond feature is Q's (well, now it's R's) arsenal of spy equipment. On the weapons front, Bond will retain his signature Walther P99 pistol. He'll also



WELCOME TO MY UNDERGROUND LAIR Many of the levels will be authentic recreations of movie areas, like this underground nuclear facility.



HE WENT OUT WITH A BANG The QUAKE III engine was modified to let Bond fling people across rooms by shooting explosive items nearby.



be able to choose from the entire arsenal in the movie. If it had a trigger and fired a bullet of some kind, it'll be in the game. Right now, though, due to licensing issues with the gun-manufacturers, the weapons have slightly different names (like, say, the "Walter PP9"). There will also be a variety of stun and tranquilizer guns for the non-killing gamer.



BOND'S BEST FRIEND All of the weapons from the movie will be in the game, including, of course, Bond's trusty Walther.

Gadget-wise, expect the same treatment as the weapons. Two confirmed items include a credit-card-sized lockpick device and a listening gadget. The lockpick will be used frequently, and—thankfully—will be more than just another key. Gamers will have to successfully complete a mini-game before picking each lock. The more complex the locks, the harder the mini-games, which are similar to the mini-games in SYSTEM SHOCK 2.

A nifty phone device will let you tap phone lines, giving you both important plot elements and gameplay hints. You'll also have a wireless device that gives mission data and may also be used as a makeshift Taser gun. And then there are those X-Ray Glasses from the casino...

Unfortunately, gamers won't be able to drive the BMW Z8, *per se*. This yuppie dream car will be a part of the game, but not in a full-scale driving sequence. Though considering the number of weapons and gadgets built into it, situations involving the car have the potential to play as interesting fly-by-wire sequences.

Remember the wild river chase in the movie? The WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH will also include missions involving that experimental boat. You'll navigate the boat through, under, and all over the Thames River—even on land—as you chase down your target. Rather than run-and-gun, this segment emphasizes the chase, and is indicative of EA's pursuit of varied, well-paced gameplay.

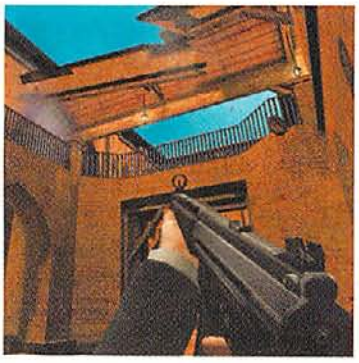
Shattering Foundations

In addition to the AI, the design team is tweaking the QUAKE 3 engine to incorporate a host of new features. The biggest change will be in the character models—a full skeletal-animation system has been implemented. In addition to more realistic movement, the enemies will also have facial animations (no more annoying cut-scenes where the characters' mouths don't move).

The physics model has also been heavily tinkered with. For example, you can fire a machine gun on a chair, and the force of the blast will launch the chair into the air. This also allows for scripted events, such as a bridge that collapses when you're chasing some goon in Istanbul. "The physics engine allows for those Rube Goldberg-type traps, where Bond can shoot a metal rod that supports a vat of hot oil right onto his enemy," reiterates Neil. "Again, we're trying to stray away from the run-and-gun, and go for more of the clever spy-type of gameplay." As a final, interesting note: The QUAKE 3 engine can now play MPEG movies. This combined with the fact that EA has the movie license means that sometimes you'll get scenes that are straight from the movie, played back as cut scenes in between missions.

For those wondering about multiplayer: The game will include some, but it's not the focus. The designers are trying to make the slickest single-player Bond adventure around. So, while we'll get deathmatch, CTF, and so forth, that's about it. The multiplayer will be there, but the team is pouring its all into the plot-driven single-player experience.

Traditionally, movie licenses have failed, mainly because they focus on pumping out a quickie game to earn a buck. What makes THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH different is the fact that the team is determined not to make this a QUAKE mod with Bond textures. The aim is to make the game feel like a Bond *experience* rather than a Bond *shooter*. With the ideas behind this game, EA may be able to escape the movie licensing curse. Who stands a better chance of getting away with it than James Bond? CGW







SHODDY CONSTRUCTION
One of the levels is a mad chase through the streets of Istanbul; at one point, this bridge will collapse and force the player to change his route. It's another departure from run-and-gun, forcing the player to focus on navigating the level and catching up with his quarry.

SimsVille

Maxis to deliver the big picture on small towns

by Robert Coffey

WINDOW-SHOPPING What would small-town life be without a Main Street full of small businesses?



If there's one frustrating thing about THE SIMS, it's that you can only torment/please one happy/miserable family of successful businessmen/bitter-inbred-losers at a time. That should change sometime next year when Maxis completes SIMSVILLE—the next likely hit in the SIM franchise.

SIMSVILLE will blend the very personal micromanagement of THE SIMS with the macromanaging of Maxis' flagship SIMCITY line. Instead of plotting sewer lines, building energy grids, or telling Bob Newbie when to shake the dew off his lily, gamers will be charged with growing, maintaining, and designing a small town in order to keep a populace of those pesky, needy Sims content. Or not. As in THE SIMS, the construction of an elaborate and cruel Skinner box is more than a vague possibility.

Family Ties

SIMSVILLE's focus will primarily be on families, with the town employed as a mechanism with which to generate family happiness and prosperity. You can import Sims from THE SIMS, but you won't exercise any direct control over them once they move into your new town. In fact, that relocation concept is particularly appropriate, since your transplanted families will get new homes, jobs, and interests once they move in. Since no one has enough families in THE SIMS to fully populate a town, you will be able to design new families (complete with the much-requested option of family pets) to fill out your own little acre of suburban heaven.

Think of yourself as a City Manager—you'll need to provide amenities to keep all the people in your bustling suburb happy. You'll need not only to build grocery stores to keep your citizens fed, but you'll have to provide park space for your active residents and enough Italian restaurants to keep lovers of fine Italian cuisine happy. Fail to satisfy your population's desires and they'll start moving out, with the abandoned storefronts, empty streets, and silent parks of a virtual ghost town sure to follow. You'll also have to make sure you're providing adequate business and maintaining a sufficient labor pool to keep your Sims employed and thriving.

As in THE SIMS, the measure of success in SIMSVILLE will come principally in the form of possessions. Ideally, your town will be flush with big homes sporting swimming pools, tennis courts, swing-sets, and redwood decks. Fail to provide a town conducive to prosperity, and you'll see unpainted shacks and a frightening number of pink plastic flamingos.

Most of the feedback you'll need will come in the form of such visuals. However, SIMSVILLE is forgoing the sleek tongue-in-cheek stylization of THE SIMS and SIMCITY in favor of a cozier, warmer motif. Indeed, the town in SIMSVILLE will positively reek Norman Rockwell, with cheerily vibrant pastels and a homey look that would be perfect for framing and hanging over your living-room sofa.

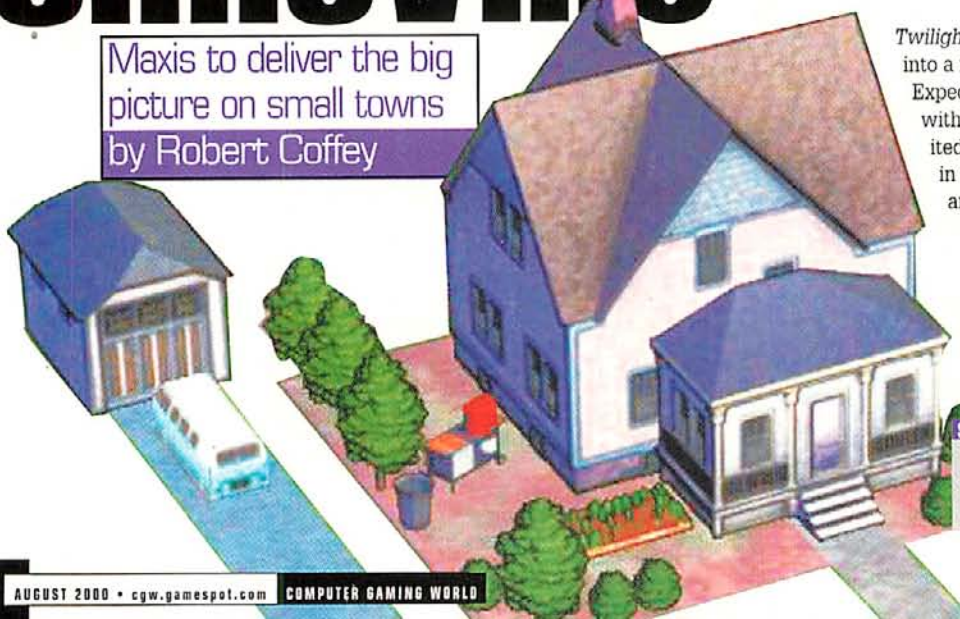
DREAM HOUSE OR HELL HOUSE? It's up to you. Provide a lousy quality of life, and your citizens will live in ramshackle squalor with polluted swimming pools and bad lawn ornamentation. Provide the building blocks for prosperity, and you'll see well-maintained, decked-out homes.





SIMSVILLE will also move the Sims out of the oddly timeless *Twilight Zone* world in which they've lived, and into a more vibrant world of changing seasons. Expect to see snow-blanketed houses strung with holiday lights during the winter, and spirited parades on a blazing July afternoon. As in THE SIMS, all this activity can be captured and stored in a storytelling scrapbook.

Will SIMSVILLE herald the onset of a massively-multiplayer online SIMS universe? Frankly, we don't know. We do know this: Just as with THE SIMS, we're eagerly looking forward to getting our clumsy, greasy hands on this one. CGW

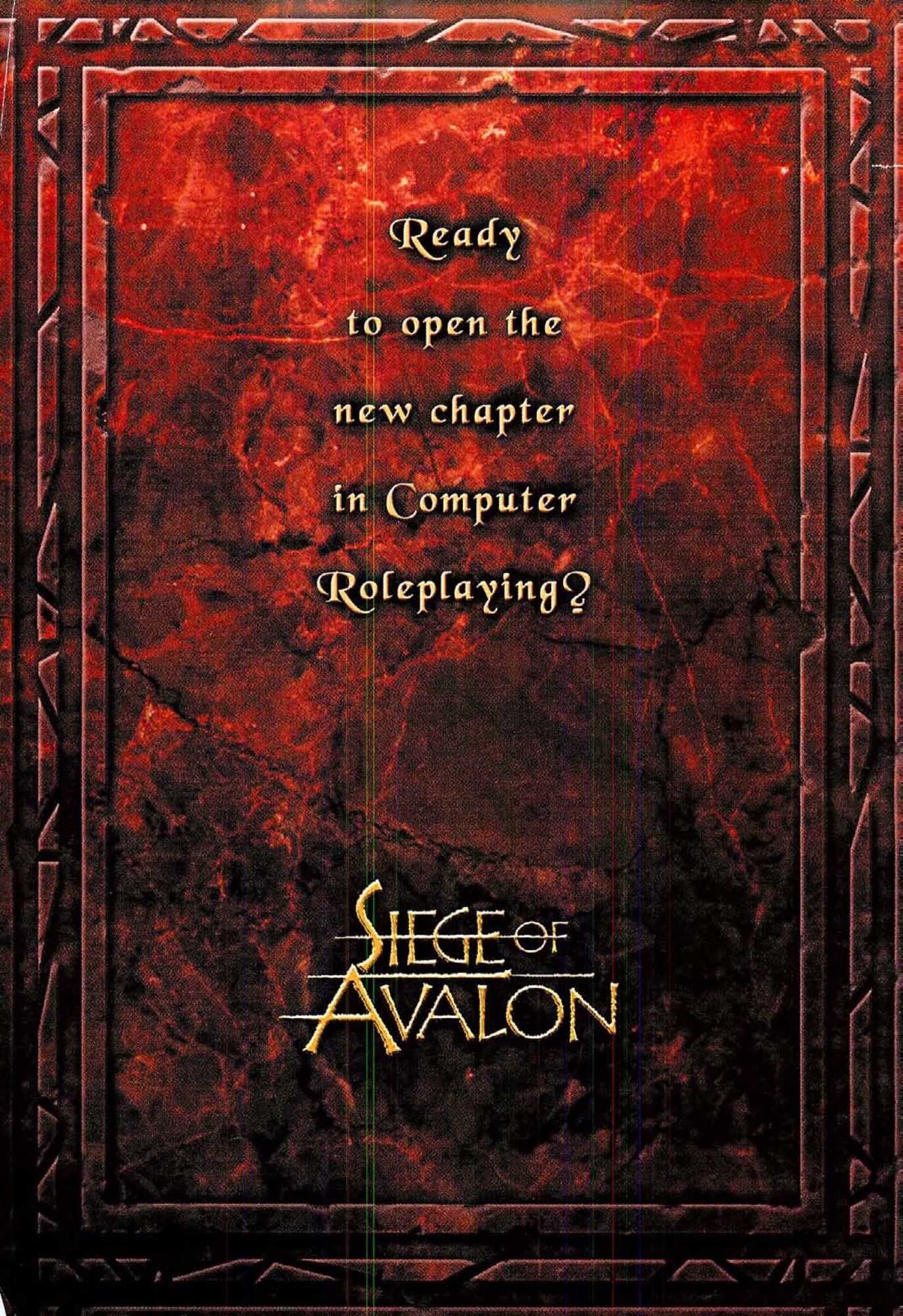


SIMSVILLE

GENRE: Strategy • **RELEASE DATE:** 2001

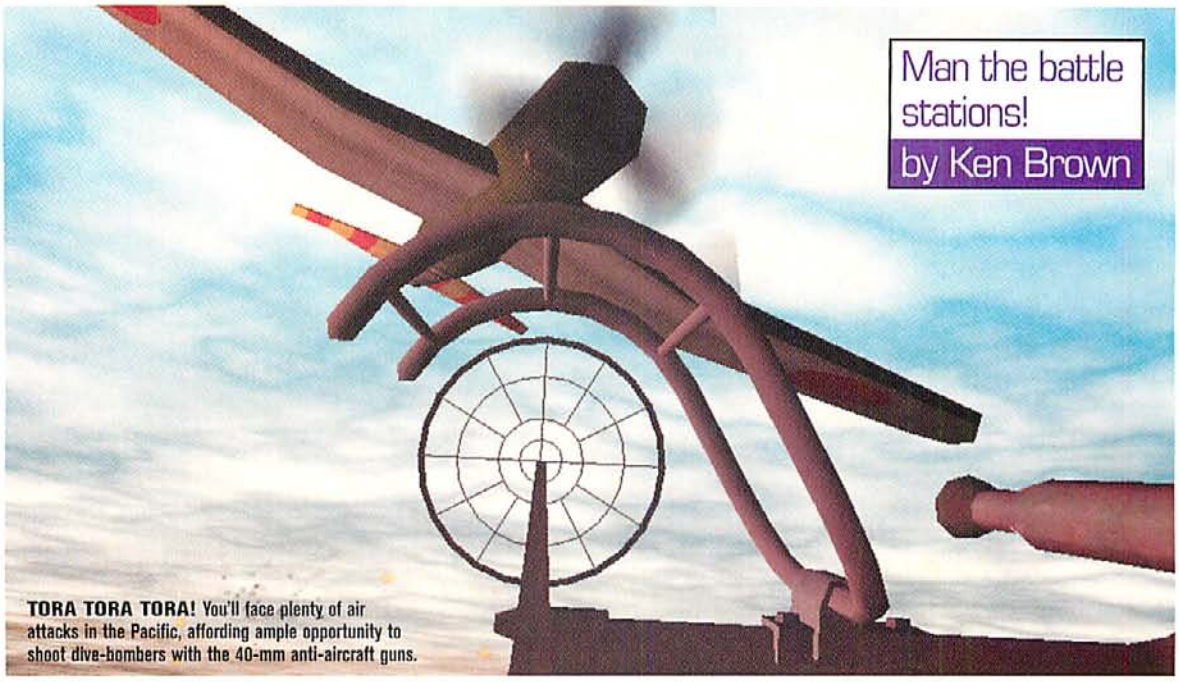
PUBLISHER: EA Games • **DEVELOPER:** Maxis

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by Ken Brown

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Destroyer Command

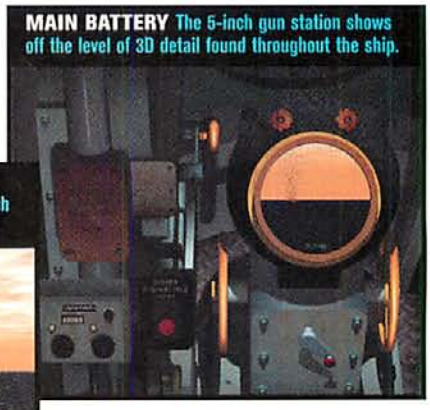
Battleships were more glamorous, but destroyers were equally responsible for turning the tide in World War II. Destroyers escorted convoys and fought U-boats in the Atlantic; and they swept mines, shot down kamikazes, and pounded enemy positions in support of ground troops in the Pacific. If you saw U-571, you know what a hell they could turn your life into if they didn't want you around.

DESTROYER COMMAND
GENRE: Simulation
RELEASE DATE: Q4 00
PUBLISHER: SSI
DEVELOPER: Ultimation

What's cool about SSI's upcoming destroyer sim is that they're going to let you experience *all* of those things firsthand. Most naval-combat games simulate a few of the stations on a sub or warship. DESTROYER COMMAND is going to give you the run of the ship, from the sonar scopes to the engine room. Wanna fire the 5-inch deck guns? Try plotting a torpedo shot? Drop a few depth charges on Gerry's kids? DESTROYER COMMAND lets you take on as much or as little as you want, while the computer handles the rest.

Two full campaigns will let players fight the entire war in the Atlantic or Pacific Theater. There will also be options for co-op and head-to-head multiplayer battles. SSI is breaking new ground by designing DESTROYER COMMAND to be compatible with SSI's upcoming SILENT HUNTER II. This means you and your friends could stalk the seas in SILENT HUNTER's U-boats, looking for willing opponents in DESTROYER COMMAND. The idea has been floated before (some Naval humor there), but this game would be the first interoperable military simulation.

Naval sims haven't been the most attractive games, with utilitarian graphics for modeling various command stations. But this game looks like a departure from the two-dimensional past. Every ship and plane in the game (more than 100) are all being built in 3D, and there'll be plenty of special effects. The ocean won't always look the same, because the developer is modeling eight different sea states including wakes, swells, horizon fog, particle spray, and weather effects. Ships will roll, pitch, list, and sink from hull damage. Just *watching* the game might make you seasick.



MAIN BATTERY The 5-inch gun station shows off the level of 3D detail found throughout the ship.



GUN IN THE SUN SSI is going for graphic glitz with particle effects, fiery explosions, and varied sea states. Note the muzzle flash from a 5-inch gun.

It's very encouraging to see SSI venture into new waters, especially since naval sims haven't exactly burned up the sales charts in recent years. But the versatility in DESTROYER COMMAND, like Hasbro's upcoming B-17, could appeal to many different kinds of gamers. We hope SSI and Mattel take the time to deliver a first-rate experience. And, if they do, we hope you do your part by joining the Navy. CGW

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- CGW
Rating: Four Stars



"If Majesty helps set a trend, then 2000 might go down in history as the year in which gaming changed forever."

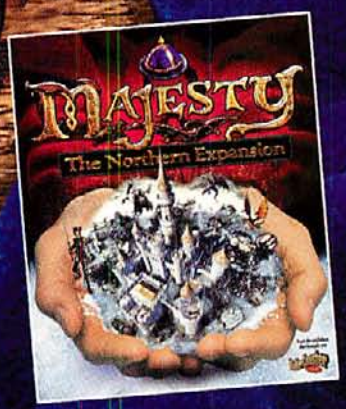
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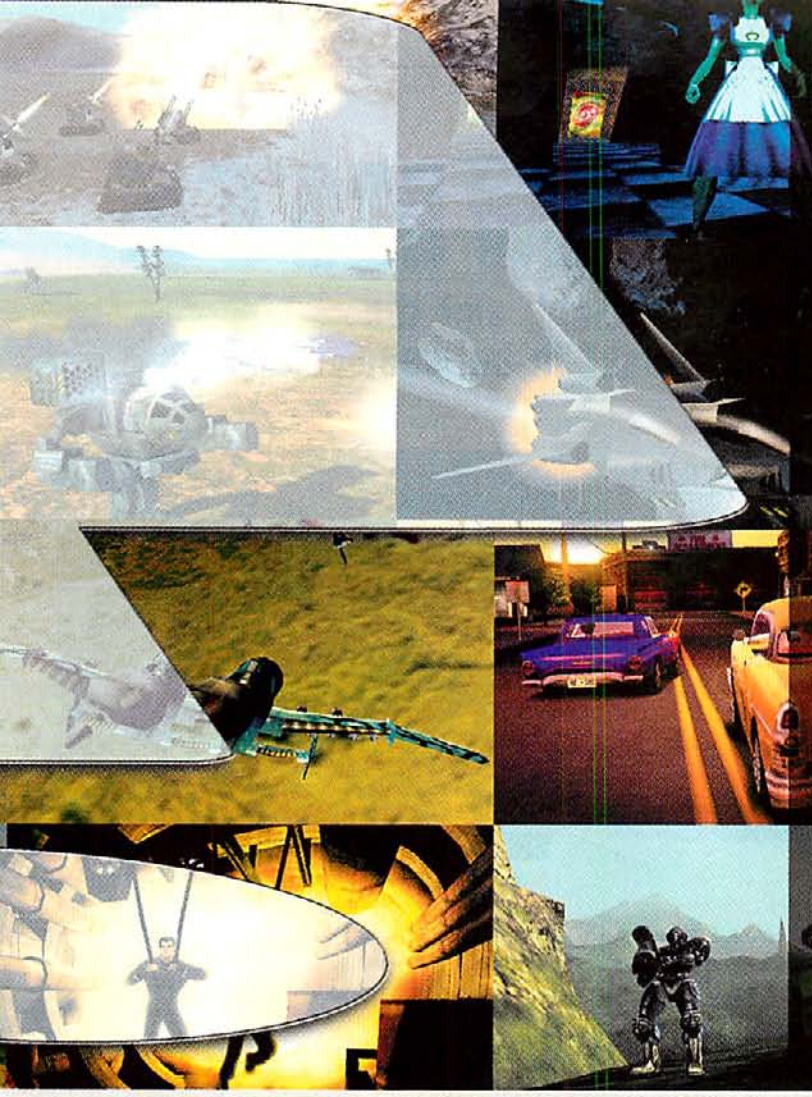
2000 Fall Games Preview:

WHERE HAVE ALL THE GENRES GONE???



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Once upon a time, you could take one look at a game and drop it into a tidy little categorical box. There were games that told stories, games that tested your reflexes, games that simulated a vehicle, games that made you think strategically. That time has long since passed.

In the course of herding together info for our annual Fall games round-up, we found some odd things. We found flight sim designers talking about narrative. We found shooters with a focus on strategic thinking. And we found *everyone* talking about role-playing elements.

These are queasy times for lovers of easy categorization, but good times for gaming. We take this "thinking outside the box" as a sign that computer gaming is, after 20 years, really starting to hit its stride. The old categories worked because games in large were still borrowing their approaches from other mediums—from books, board games, live role-playing, and the arcades. The blending of gaming styles has come about as game designers have shed the trappings of the past and begun to explore the unique entertainment potential of this very young medium.

Yes, the old categories are dead. And gaming is taking on a life of its own.

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SINGLE WHITE HERO

You, the world, and the fools caught in between

The emphasis on the gamer-as-singular-hero in the action genre is even stronger this year. UNREAL TOURNAMENT and QUAKE III ARENA made the line between single- and multiplayer even more distinct, and have thus affected this year's batch of games. With those two games legitimizing "multiplayer only" as a subgenre within action, the counter-response has been to craft games that not only focus on single-player, but aren't even packing token multiplayer. One thing's for sure: The emphasis on the lone hero makes for some quality gameplay.



Metal Gear Solid

Game to Watch

MAX PAYNE

One of the things people loved about HALF-LIFE was how it felt like you were the star of a good action movie. MAX PAYNE looks to take that sentiment to a different level; it'll give gamers a chance to feel like they're in a John Woo movie.

The first noticeable thing about MAX PAYNE is the graphics. With a proprietary 3D engine, the Remedy team (designing the game for G.O.D.) is squeezing a whole lot of visual detail into the game. Zoom in on Payne's hardened face, and you can spot individual creases and wrinkles. Zooming in on the gun reveals the serial number chiseled into it. Also, rather than have hit-scan weaponry (where the gun automatically hits whatever is in front of it, regardless of distance), the game will actually model individual bullets in flight.

The cinematic angle comes from the gameplay. Primarily third-person, you'll be able to pull off fancy moves like rolling along the ground, blasting away with guns akimbo. When you dispatch a thug in a particularly cool fashion, the game will pull a "stop-time," where time will freeze, and the camera will pan around your victim as he dies in slow motion (think *The Matrix*...or those annoying Gap commercials).

The gritty noir atmosphere, plus the cinematic angle, makes MAX PAYNE look like the next great shooter.



SNEAKY SPIES AND LIES

With METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY on the horizon, it's great timing for Microsoft to be rolling out a PC port of the original **METAL GEAR SOLID**. Boasting Direct3D-enhanced graphics and the option to go to a first-person perspective at any time, the port will include all the gameplay of the original—and all the extra missions from the VR-Mission Pack. Gamers without a PlayStation will finally get to see what all the hoopla for this instant classic was about.

MGS2 isn't the only game involving a covert ops agenda. There's the "official" spy in the form of James Bond (see **THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH** preview on 46), and there's also the unofficial Agent Archer from **NO ONE LIVES FOREVER**. Long mired in controversy, this Austin-Powers-flavored shooter looks ready to roll. It'll be the first title with the new LithTech 2.0 engine, and will feature even goofier and more over-the-top gadgets than Bond. Robotic-poodle-bomb, anyone? So many games take themselves way too seriously, so it'll be enticing to see how this satirical approach fares.

Another game that will combine thought, stealth, and gunplay is Eidos' **HITMAN: CODENAME 47**. While the game features 27 levels, there are only five "hits," resulting in a major emphasis on planning, acquiring equipment, and being a sneaky little hitman. The developers are saying that most missions will be 80% planning and 20% hitting. Eidos' **I'M GOING IN** will also have a sneaky commando; think of it as "THIEF With Guns." While the premise resembles *Rambo*, gamers who put a bit of thought and sneakiness into their play-style will be rewarded.

OLD-SCHOOL ACTION IN MODERN DRESS

The genre is also witnessing the return of some old names. First off, there's the ultra-secretive **DUKE NUKEM FOREVER**. George Broussard stresses the lack of a specific release date ("when it's done"), but we're thinking that the DUKE will probably squeak into the scene sometime before Christmas. The only real confirmed fact is that it's still in

Game to Watch

AMERICAN MCGEE'S ALICE

Disney may have made *Alice In Wonderland* safe for kids, but we know better. Rather than replicate the Disneyfication of Lewis Carroll's classic, Rogue Entertainment decided to take the story and make it more akin to the book's drug-addled, maddening vision. Imagine Tim Burton loading up on LSD and magic mushrooms and telling the story—AMERICAN MCGEE'S ALICE might be the result.

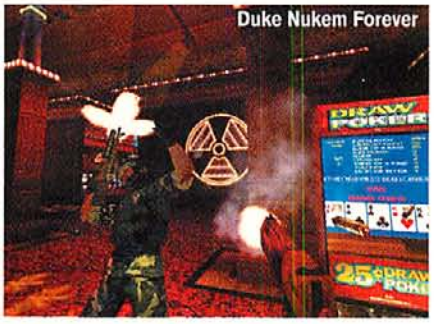
ALICE takes place after the second book, *Through The Looking Glass*, and opens with Alice committed to an insane asylum. White Rabbit, dressed like an undertaker, goes on to tell Alice that the Red Queen is back, and Alice goes tumbling down the rabbit hole again.

The third-person-perspective gameplay looks pretty good, but it's the enemy- and level-design that really make the game stand out. The new, horrific rendering of Tweedledee and Tweedledum alone should cause nightmares in children and senior citizens. The Chess Village is rendered in black and white, and features a giant chessboard floating in an abyss; one of the puzzles will be how to navigate around this massive floating board. With the QUAKE III ARENA engine powering this game, those surreal environments will take full advantage of whatever gee-whiz video card you have when ALICE comes out late this year. Our only hope is that it doesn't devolve into a typical 3D shooter.



If we were glib, we'd call it "TOMB RAIDER on acid." But it's a lot more than that, and it's definitely one to watch.

development, and that it'll be using a heavily-modified UNREAL engine (much as how HALF-LIFE was a heavily-modified QUAKE engine). Though Broussard has been heard on message boards proclaiming that the game will retain all the stuff that made the original DUKE NUKEM 3D fantastic—with even more interactive environments—we'll see if the DUKE can top Gordon Freeman.



Another old face is B.J. Blaskowicz, in **RETURN TO WOLFENSTEIN**. With the QUAKE III ARENA engine powering it, thumping Nazi goons looks absolutely delectable. Gray Matter has some interesting ideas for missions—such as tank hijacking—but with id having final say as to what's cool and what's not, we'll have to wait to see whether these ideas get implemented.

While not an old-school action game, **COMMAND & CONQUER: RENEGADE** is borne out of Westwood's traditional RTS series. The Commando was perhaps the coolest unit in C&C, since he could take out both Nod thugs and buildings with equally reckless abandon. Recognizing this, Westwood crafted an action game solely around him. You'll run about the field in third-person perspective, enacting missions similar to those found in the original C&C, but from the Commando's eyes. Want to make a later mission easier? Blow up that Nod Harvester. Don't feel like taking on an entire Nod platoon? Snipe at them from afar. The use of strategic elements from the original C&C will make for an interesting addition to this third-person shoot-em-up.

A game that predates even WOLFENSTEIN is getting a sequel: **ALONE IN THE DARK: THE NEW NIGHTMARE**. You'll be playing good ol' Edward Carnby again (this time around, he's shaved his reliable mustache) as he scours Shadow Island for an explanation as to why his friend is dead. In a throwback to the original game, you can also play as a female character: Aline Cedrac. This sequel looks like it will retain the same feeling of tension and fear that the original game (and its imitators, such as the RESIDENT EVIL series) had.

Then there's **OBI-WAN**, LucasArts' follow-up to JEDI KNIGHT. At E3, we went to see what had changed since our preview a while back (*CGW* #191), and the most significant addition was the multiplayer. Now we know for sure that gamers will get to play as Darth Maul in multiplayer, and will even be able to choose which lightsaber (double- or single-blade) to wield.

NEW WAYS TO RUN AMOK

The genre isn't all just about sneaky people, or old games given a face-lift; some new and genuinely interesting games are also in development. License aside, **KISS: PSYCHO CIRCUS** features a good mix of action and out-and-out weirdness. Throughout the game, you'll be able to pick up multiple items that will get you closer to becoming one of the Elders (the KISS members themselves). Look for things such as kooky KISS references, a redefinition of the phrase "horde of monsters," and some of the most bizarre bosses in gaming (like a psychotic clown that grows bigger and bigger).



RUNE will appeal to gamers with more primordial desires. Taking place in the Viking era, RUNE will let you do what Vikings do best: cleave people with a huge axe with reckless abandon. The game will be using a modified UNREAL engine, so you know that places such as the frozen mountains or even Valhalla itself will look mighty fine. The UNREAL engine has also been tweaked to

QUESTION 1

What Kind of System Will You Need for 2001?

When gearing up to play the upcoming titles this holiday season, don't bring a knife to a gun fight. To predict how fast a system you'll need to keep these games moving smoothly involves deep critical thinking, laborious extrapolations, and well, a blindfold, some darts, and a dartboard. But for this Fall and early into next year, you'll want a system that looks something like this:

- 500MHz CPU
- GeForce or Voodoo 5-based 3D card
- 128MB of system memory
- PCI-based sound card
- Windows 98 SE
- DirectX 7.0a (and probably DirectX 8 when it ships, assuming there aren't any major problems)

With a system of (or close to) this caliber, you should be able to run your games smoothly at 1024x768 in 32-bit color, and still have cycles left over to keep AI, physics, audio, and collision detection churning along.

QUESTION 2

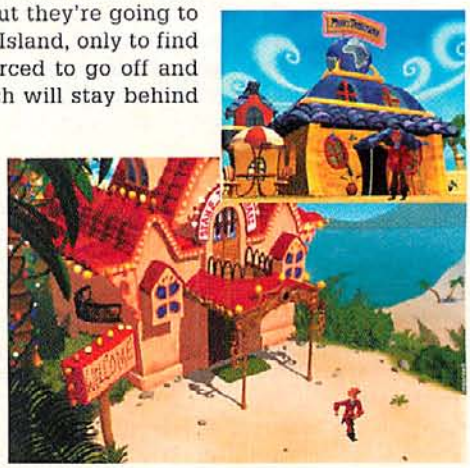
Where Has the Adventure Game Gone?

No, this isn't our attempt to tell you once again that the adventure genre is dead. We just got to thinking around here that what used to be the hallmark of the traditional adventure game—exploring environments, solving puzzles, following a story—has slowly but surely insinuated itself into other genres, most notably action. Half-Life, in fact, might be considered one of the best adventure games of the decade—since the story and characters remain as memorable as the game's action. Look toward games like MAX PAYNE in the coming year to offer the same kind of narrative thrills along with the action. If you simply must play an old-school adventure game, raise a glass in salute to LucasArts for bringing back MONKEY ISLAND for one more go-around. And the biggest secret about adventure games? They're alive and thriving better than ever in the children's market, especially the ones from Humongous. PYJAMA SAM 3 is the best adventure game of the year—and no, we're not kidding.

Game to Watch

ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND

LucasArts' fourth MONKEY ISLAND game isn't an action game, but Guybrush surely is a single white hero. Well, okay, he got married to Elaine at the end of CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND, but they're going to get separated...again. They get back to Melee Island, only to find Elaine's manor being destroyed, and she's forced to go off and conduct a reelection campaign while Guybrush will stay behind and, irrevocably, cause more trouble.



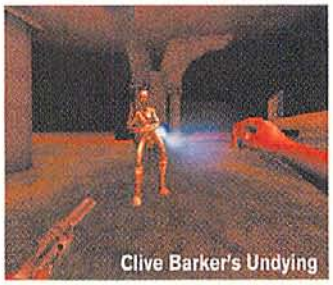
Designed by the same team who did the love-it-or-hate-it SAM'N'MAX game, ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND might be the only old-school adventure game released this year. The modernized graphics (think GRIM FANDANGO, where 3D characters inhabited 2D space) bring a refreshing vision to locations last seen in MONKEY ISLAND I, like the Scumm Bar or the Voodoo Lady's Shop. The game will take place on Melee Island, Monkey Island, and a host of other locations. Returning characters will include the Voodoo Lady, Murray The Skull, and—perhaps—Stan.

Gameplay looks very traditional, and even has revisions of MONKEY ISLAND traditions; Insult Swordfighting has been phased out, and Insult Armwrestling has taken its place. Despite the low sales of GRIM FANDANGO, LucasArts looks like it'll stick with the traditional adventure genre and put out another quality adventure come Fall. Hallelujah.

induce dramatic moments. At one point you pick up a torch, and the light reveals a horde of beasties in the darkness. But then you can smack them in the face with your newfound torch, giving them a lick of Viking flame.

CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING may finally fill in the horror/shooter gap that the original BLOOD left behind. You'll run around, dispatching horrors with unpronounceable names—such as Hounds Of Ghelziabahr or Di'nen—with both spells and weapons. While that all sounds nice and standard, it's the combination of level design, enemy design, and aural atmosphere that makes this game genuinely creepy.


Oni


Clive Barker's Undying

Gamers wishing for a new installment in the CRUSADER games may find satisfaction in THQ's **RED FACTION**. While this game is in early, early development, two words already excite us: destructible environments. That's right, your penchant for mayhem is no longer confined to windows; now you can blow away walls and even building foundations. If some goon is sniping at you from the tower, make the whole tower crash down. RED FACTION is being developed by Volition, the same guys who made both FREESPACE games.

Finally, Bungie is still tweaking **ONI**. Any fan of *Ghost In The Shell* will appreciate this game; just like the Major in *Ghost*, Konoko runs around and either thumps thugs using only her hands and feet, or simply caps them with a multitude of weapons. Alas, the multiplayer component was axed—since the design team can only get it working on a LAN, they're scrapping it entirely. With the multiplayer out, Bungie is doubling its effort to craft a quality single-player title. While we'll miss the ability to smack each other around (and especially to smack Jeff Green), we're confident that Bungie will be able to combine a well-crafted story and superb action together as well as they've done in the past.


Obi-Wan


Alone in the Dark

TOP 10 Games to Play With Yourself

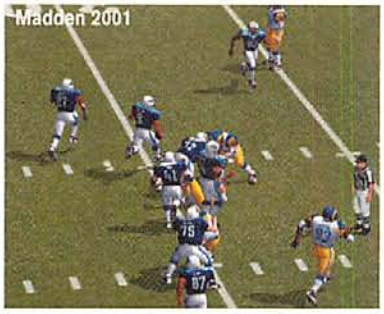
1. MAX PAYNE
2. AMERICAN MCGEE'S ALICE
3. ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND
4. METAL GEAR SOLID
5. ONI
6. DUKE NUKEM FOREVER
7. RED FACTION
8. RENEGADE
9. RETURN TO WOLFENSTEIN
10. ALONE IN THE DARK: THE NEW NIGHTMARE

SPORTS NIGHT

With PlayStation 2 and X-Box looming large, PC sports face a tough year

The one category of games that will never experience an identity crisis nevertheless appears to be on the brink of a major transformation. With non-traditional sports titles like DEER HUNTER outperforming the Big 4 (football, baseball, basketball, hockey) on store shelves, game companies are shifting focus to lighter, more mainstream titles.

This isn't to say that no one is making football or basketball games anymore. EA Sports is still maintaining steadfast devotion to the PC platform. Even if the PC versions of the company's sports lineup tend to trail its console titles, they still sit head-and-shoulders above the rest of the crowd.



MADDEN 2001 improves upon last year's version with more detailed animations, sound effects that include coaches screaming at players, and much-improved play-calling that will allow you to make quick defensive and offensive adjustments at the line of scrimmage. Central to EA Sports' PC plans are the game's Internet components, which will allow you to play tournaments or entire seasons online, and to be ranked according to your performance. MADDEN should be released in September.

NBA LIVE 2001 is taking a similar approach to MADDEN with several small tweaks and changes, the biggest of which involves low-post players, who will now be able to make actual low-post moves like the up-and-under, jump hooks, or dropsteps. In addition to online matching and play, one other interesting feature of LIVE 2001 (scheduled for released in November) is a rewards system, which challenges you with achieving certain in-game goals, such as racking up a triple-double or winning by ten.

Aside from the usual graphical enhancements, AI improvements, and online play, NHL 2001 and FIFA 2001 aren't experiencing any major changes, which is fine with us—both are rock solid.

QUESTION 3

What's up with Microsoft?

Microsoft will not be releasing any 2001 sports titles this year, due to quality considerations and the X-Box (see Inside Gaming page 133), which is a huge downer for PC sports fans given the quality of last year's NFL FEVER and NBA INSIDE DRIVE. So for now, the market is all about EA Sports, who win by default. Here's hoping that Microsoft doesn't entirely neglect the PC franchise when it comes to sports games. Talk about bitter ironies.

Game System to Watch

SONY'S PLAYSTATION 2

What's black and blue and red all over? Sony's PlayStation 2, guaranteed to be the hot ticket for digital sports fans this year—even devout PC gamers. Two minutes of Madden 2001 or NBA Live 2001 on this next-generation system makes it clear to us that EA Sports is going to bring us a sporting experience unlike anything we've seen before. Both titles feature amazing visuals (including jaw-dropping between-play animations in Madden) and excellent action-oriented play, as well as a full complement of GM-driven features. But what's really impressive is the physical and emotional intensity of the sport that EA appears to be capturing. Coaches scream at their players—whose eyes dart nervously back and forth. Players yell and congratulate each other after spectacular plays. These are subtleties to be sure, but they make a huge difference.



If you're a fan of sports games, understand this: Resistance is futile. The first time you lay eyes on these games, you will find that you too are caught in Sony's 500+ million-dollar marketing machine.

FORE!

On the golf side of things, both TIGER WOODS and LINKS 2001 are making great strides towards unbelievable photorealism and lightening-fast refresh rates. Each game will take slightly different approaches with their online-play components. TIGER allows you to play in real-life tournaments against real-life pros, whose shots are tracked during play. LINKS—through the Virtual Golfer's Assocation—will allow you to win actual prize money in a virtual tour.

STREET CREDS

New to the market this year are a few alterna-sports titles that actually hold some promise. Activision is bringing their best-selling TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER skateboarding game—which is surprisingly entertaining and boasts an amazing soundtrack—over to the PC. And Mattel is readying a surfing "simulator" for the PC, BILLABONG PRO SURFER, that raised even our jaded, mainstream-weary eyebrows. Both games should be out this fall.

TOP 5 Games for Jocks

1. PLAYSTATION 2 SPORTS TITLES
2. JOHN MADDEN 2001
3. NBA LIVE 2001
4. TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER
5. LINKS 2001



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DUNGEON MASTERS

How to cope with a world that seems more like *The Matrix* every day? By escaping into fantasy games, that's how. There's often no better cure for modern nightmares like road rage and dot.com fever and Kid Rock than to adorn ourselves with chain mail and green Elvish hats and go pound on some orcs and dragons for awhile.

The 900-pound gorilla of fantasy games is, of course, DIABLO II, which, as of this writing, was going through the supposedly "final" testing before release. Which means we may all be clutching our precious CDs, Gollum-like, in our slimy hands as you read this. Oh yesssss.

Quality fantasy games for your inner Elf

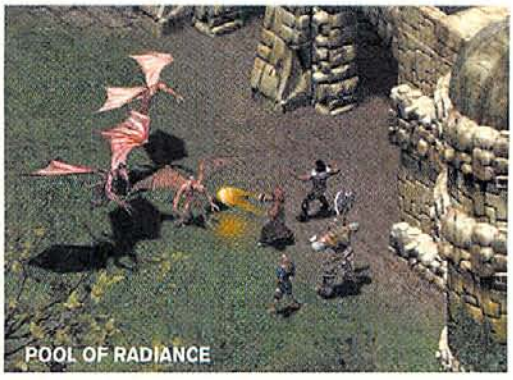
SONS OF GYGAX

For the legions of *Dungeons and Dragons* fans around the world, there's even bigger news than DIABLO II this year. Not only are the highly-anticipated 3rd Edition rules coming out, but a number of computer games are on the way—thanks mainly to the mind-boggling success of Interplay's BALDUR'S GATE. First out should be Interplay's ICEWIND DALE, which uses the BG engine for a more hack-and-slash affair set in the *Forgotten Realms* (see the "Can Anything Stop DIABLO II?" sidebar).


BALDUR'S GATE II

Next up is BALDURS GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN. Bioware is feeling huge pressure with this game, not merely because the first game sold over a million copies, but because they want this one to be better. The game has been near completion for months already, but, like Blizzard, Bioware is pouring over the details now, tweaking the gameplay and interface for maximum results. The game's varied environments, full-screen and high resolution graphics, and more-complicated character development impressed us way back in our January issue. Bhaal knows how much better it'll be when it ships this Fall.

Equally exciting is SSI's POOL OF RADIANCE: RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR, also due by year's end. This *Forgotten Realms* game holds bragging rights, not only as a sequel to the first PC *D&D* game ever made (and developed by the same studio, Stormfront), but it's also the first to incorporate the new 3rd Edition rules—meaning brand new monsters, spells, and character classes, among other changes. A fully-3D engine and a phased-combat system will also set PoR apart.


POOL OF RADIANCE

THEY LIVE

The previous role-playing game in Bethesda's THE ELDER SCROLLS series, DAGGERFALL, is so old now that we barely remember it—other than it ran in DOS and was buggy as hell. It was also, for those who stuck with

Game to Watch

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

We were excited about NEVERWINTER NIGHTS from the moment Bioware first described it to us nearly a year ago. Now that we've seen it, now that there's code, now that the word is spreading amongst the RPG community—we're more excited than ever. If BALDUR'S GATE brought the fantasy RPG back to the forefront of computer gaming, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS has the potential to take the genre into the stratosphere.

What the massive-multiplayer games have lacked so far—despite their popularity—is focus, and purpose. How do you feel like the hero of an epic, with 10,000 people around all fighting the same monsters? Bioware's answer is to let gamers create their own epics instead. NEVERWINTER NIGHTS will allow anyone to become a Dungeon Master for servers of up to 64 people, and servers themselves can interconnect to create infinite worlds. Powered by the new *D&D* 3rd Edition rules, and featuring a truly stunning 3D engine, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS is a blockbuster in the making—the first massively-multiplayer RPG that we think will truly live up to the hype.



Game to Watch

DUNGEON SIEGE

A few action/RPGs mildly diverted our attention last year, but wouldn't have stood a chance against DIABLO II. The one upcoming action/RPG that may actually survive the D2 hubbub is DUNGEON SIEGE, the latest brainchild from Chris (TOTAL ANNIHILATION) Taylor and his crew at Gas Powered Games. Taylor has been promising a blend of hack-and-slash action with real-time strategy elements, as you bash your way through a huge, continuous (meaning no load-screens) 3D world. So far, what we've seen hasn't amounted to much more than a technology demo, but it's an impressive one, offering gamers interesting new options—such as the RTS-style ability to order your whole party into combat at once, as well as the state-of-the-art eye candy that DIABLO 2 conspicuously lacks. Add in Taylor's proven gameplay smarts and Microsoft's marketing muscle, and DUNGEON SIEGE looks like a strong contender.





MORROWIND

it, a phenomenally deep old-school RPG, and it garnered legions of fans despite its flaws. Bethesda has finally officially announced the sequel, **MORROWIND**, and the early looks have given us something to drool over. The game will once again be a huge and open-ended, with a similar skills-based system to DAGGERFALL, but all rendered in full 3D. Keep your eyes peeled here for more soon.

Also missing in action until recently has been D.W. Bradley. When we first previewed the next fantasy role-playing game from the designer of WIZARDRY V-VII, it was two years ago, the game was called SWORDS AND SORCERY, it was being published by Virgin, and its focus was on multiplayer gaming. Now it's called **WIZARDS AND WARRIORS**, it's published by Activision, and it's a single-player-only game. No matter. Bradley is a consummate, hardcore RPG designer, and this fantasy game is a large, story-driven RPG with the kind of deep, multi-optioned, stat-based system that hardcore fans lust after. This game has been all over the map for so long that it's hard to judge it now, but the last demo we saw was outstanding—combining the complexity of the old WIZARDRY games with the accessibility of the MIGHT AND MAGIC series.

Speaking of which, New World Computing and 3DO will be trotting out **LEGENDS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC**, the 100th game in the series to be released this year. Actually, if we cut the snideness for a moment, LEGENDS may be—we hope—the beginning of a rejuvenation for the series, which has suffered from a glut of lackluster titles. LEGENDS is the first multiplayer M&M game, offering both cooperative and combative modes for up to five players over the Internet. It's also the first game to finally feature a real 3D engine—in this case, the stunning LithTech 2.0. Less a hardcore RPG than New World's answer to DIABLO, it's still going to be interesting to follow.

Finally, the one non-RPG on our list of fantasy games is **MAGIC AND MAYHEM: THE ART OF MAGIC**, the sequel to last year's small gem from Mythos Games, makers of the original X-COM. The original MAGIC AND MAYHEM was an odd, mission-based mix of real-time strategy and role-playing that really managed to suck in those who gave it a chance. Although it disappeared without a trace, we're thrilled to see that Bethesda will publish the sequel early next year, with a revamped 3D engine and new spells and creatures. Score one for the little guys.



WIZARDS & WARRIORS

TOP 10 Games for PC Faeries

1. DIABLO II
2. NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
3. DUNGEON SIEGE
4. BALDUR'S GATE II
5. POOL OF RADIANCE
6. MORROWIND
7. ICEWIND DALE
8. MAGIC AND MAYHEM 2:
9. WIZARDS AND WARRIORS
10. LEGENDS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

QUESTION 4

Can Anything Stop Diablo II?

In a word: No. DIABLO II, sales-wise at least, is going to be in its own stratosphere. There's no touching it. Most publishers know this and are trying to schedule the release of their games around it, just like movie studios do to avoid being buried by major Hollywood blockbusters. ICEWIND DALE looks like a strong title, but how many people will buy it over DIABLO II if they ship at the same time? Right. Virtually no one. Interplay knows this—as do all the other publishers—and they're wringing their hands trying to figure out how to avoid Blizzard's juggernaut. The one fantasy game with any real chance to compete sales-wise is Black Isle's BALDUR'S GATE II, which has a name and following of its own. But it's a much more hardcore game, whereas everybody and their granny will be playing DIABLO II.

QUESTION 5

Are RPGs Taking Over?

In a word: Yes. Not only are a ton of high-profile, highly promising RPGS in development, but the key tenets of the genre itself are creeping their way into games of all kinds—including action, strategy, sims, even sports. PC developers are starting to take clues from some of the best console designers, who have learned that even in as unlikely a game as MARIO GOLF for the Color Game Boy, a few role-playing elements can go a long way towards motivating players to stay with a game. Give players a character they can build themselves, their own way, and you give them the emotional attachment that leads to gaming addiction. Saying a game has "role-playing elements" is the marketing cliché of the year, as everybody scrambles to jump on the bandwagon. So raise your glasses of mead, role-players, and give yourselves a toast: ye have won the battle at last!

WEIRD SCIENCE

The Near-Future Is Too Strange for Comfort

Science fiction gaming is no longer confined to some glorious far future. A whole slew of new sci-fi games are set in worlds that could be in tomorrow's headlines, and some even reach back to muck with our past.

Sierra is hoping that **ARCANUM** will strike a raw nerve in role-players. Based in a pseudo-*D&D* 19th century, players form their own party of intrepid adventurers to explore a vast land of steam and magic. Technological monstrosities abound in a world where magic and metal do not get along. Form a tech-heavy party and some of your spells might fizzle. Too many wizards, and your guns will be prone to jamming more often. It should make for some interesting juxtaposition, and some tough party decisions.


Anachronox

Following the same magic vs. tech line is **ORIGIN**, the new massively-multiplayer online RPG from...well, Origin. Players can choose from three races, one of which is the sexy cat-women called the Meer. ORIGIN will feature an interesting blend of swords, sorcery, and steel in a persistent online environment.

One of last year's biggest E3 smashes, **GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO**, is shaping up quite nicely. This multiplayer action-oriented tour-de-force should reach you by Christmas. The developers have added lots of new goodies to keep online matches fresh and varied.

Ion Storm has two strange sci-flavored games in the pipe. **ANACHRONOX**, Tom Hall's CHRONO TRIGGER-inspired epic, should be hitting shelves by the time you read this. The ANACHRONOX story will lead players across many planets and into some wildly diverse environments, where they'll face a unique, non-random combat model, mini-quests that develop certain characters, and a surprising sense of humor.



Then there's **DEUS EX**, Ion Storm's magnum opus. With a magnificent story and extensive open-ended gameplay, it should be just what the doctor ordered for SYSTEM SHOCK addicts. As a secret agent in the future, you must stop nano-technology from being used for evil. Nanites aren't the only similarities between DEUS EX and SYSTEM SHOCK: There's also heavy character modification in the way of cybernetic implants and lots of "attack is your worst option"-type situations.

Finally, there's the enigmatic **STARTOPIA**. Reminicent of SIMTOWER in space, STARTOPIA has you ruling a space station awash in a decaying universe. You'll contend with nine different alien races and a horde of competitors, all trying to make the space station their home. Alien races don't get much weirder than these guys: two-headed green dudes, slug-things, and strange mole/cyborg hybrids. Zounds!

Game to Watch

SIGMA

SIGMA, the Next Big Thing from Relic (HOMEWORLD), appears to be ripped directly from the pages of The Island of Dr. Moreaux. Set in the 1930's, the game takes place on a series of secret islands in the middle of nowhere, and involves some extremely bizarre tinkering with the very essence of life. In the process, chaos and danger ensue, forcing you to go after an ultimate bad guy by rounding up animals and genetically combining them to achieve your goals.

SIGMA promises some interesting variants on real-time gameplay. Players will have total freedom to create units by mixing the DNA of varoius animals. So, if you were so inclined, you could blend a hedgehog and a whale, thus creating a gigantic Spiny Norman. Further combinations with a snake could make Norman venomous, or give him massive fangs. The number of possible combinations are said to be in the billions.



TOP 5 Games for the Weird

1. SIGMA
2. DEUS EX
3. ANACHRONOX
4. ARCANUM
5. GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO

QUESTION 6

Why are exploding barnyard animals so big this year?

There's a disturbing new trend in gaming: explosive farm animals. SIGMA aside, there are plenty of games that abuse fuzzy mammals in bizarre ways. Peter Molyneux's BLACK & WHITE, for example, features 100-foot-tall cows battling to the death with monkeys and tigers.

RED ALERT 2 takes bovine abuse to a new plateau by allowing players to control the minds of innocent moo-cows. Once controlled, cows can be loaded up with explosives and sent into an enemy base as a sort of leather kamikaze.

Of course, SHEEP is the most bizarre of them all. You're a shepherd leading a squad of brain-dead sheep through hazardous areas in order to return the poor lambs to—we swear we are not making this up—their space-alien brethren. Yup.

DOGS OF WAR

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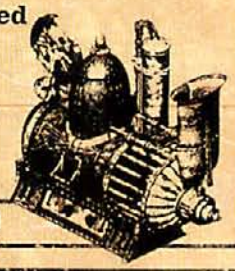
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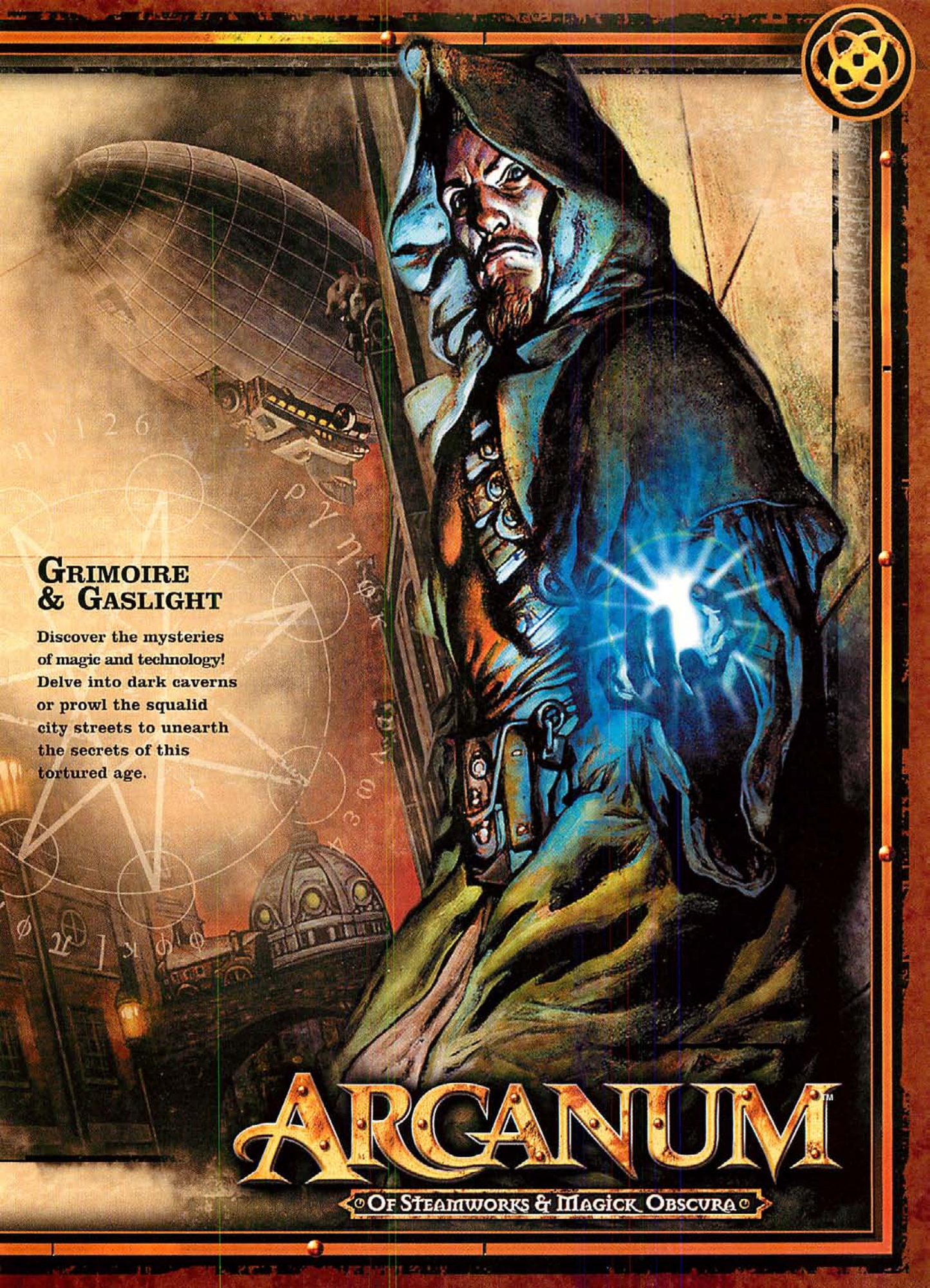
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MOD SQUAD

When victory takes a group effort

While the whole "lone gunman" concept works great for conspiracy theories and Bruce Willis movies, it's not particularly realistic; whether taking out a terrorist cell, infiltrating a building packed with shotgun-toting mutants, or simply ferrying an enemy flag to your base, you'll need a team to be successful. And when your team wins, well, the sense of accomplishment is generally a little richer than the one you get beating the world single-handedly. The best of the upcoming squad-based games understand that. Whether asking you to work as part of a team in a multiplayer shooter, or tasking you with coordinating and exploiting the skills and idiosyncrasies of a squad you command, they strive to deliver the rich rewards and camaraderie that are part and parcel of group efforts.


The Dreamland Chronicles: Freedom Ridge

PLAYING PRIVATE RYAN

Unquestionably the most anticipated multiplayer game on the *CGW* radar is **TEAM FORTRESS 2: BROTHERHOOD OF ARMS**. Sporting a gritty, battle-weary feel instantly recognizable to anyone who's ever seen a WWII movie, TF2 is aiming to grab the online arena by the throat. Valve Software is building on the incredible success of its TEAM FORTRESS mod for HALF-LIFE by expanding beyond simple capture-the-flag contests, to multiple scenario mini-campaigns where teams will have to fight across a series of battlefields—each with its own unique objectives—before a winner is decided. Throw in Valve's new 3D graphics engine, and, frankly, we don't see how this game can miss.

If anyone is poised to trump TF2, however, it's Bungie Software and **HALO**. Taking place on a ring-shaped alien world, the single-player game is a standard (if unbe-frickin'-lievably beautiful) "one man versus the alien horde" deal; what's really grabbed our attention is the team-based multiplayer game, where gamers can slug it out as either the aliens or humans. Vehicles can be manned by multiple players, allowing one to drive, one to ride shotgun, and a third to man a

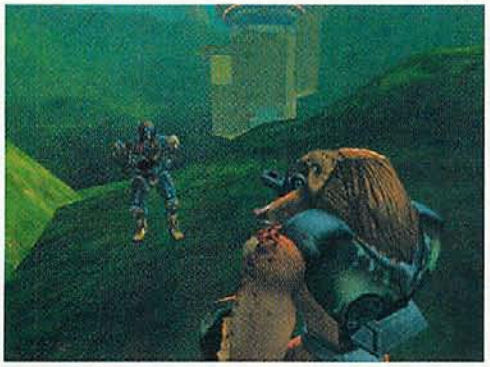
Game to Watch

TRIBES 2



Right on track for a Fall 2000 release, TRIBES 2 may be just the thing to tide you over while HALO and TEAM FORTRESS 2 dither on release dates. Hell, with its enormous environments and challenging teamplay, TRIBES 2 might make you forget those games.

No other team-shooter's gameworld has as much of an impact on gameplay as TRIBES 2. Maps are enormous sweeping expanses that force squads to defend, seize, and exploit the terrain as well as concentrate on objectives in order to win. Unlike the more focused firefights of other games, TRIBES 2 will have multiple skirmishes occurring all over the map, as artillerymen bombard an enemy base with the help of spotters, snipers struggle to hold a valley, and vehicles loaded with gun-laden infantry tear across the landscape.



New games, new weapons, new tribes, a real single-player mode, and the addition of land vehicles will offer TRIBES veterans plenty of incentive to upgrade to this year's model. Sierra is also wisely incorporating a completely built-in browser and messaging system in order to build upon the already-stalwart TRIBES community.

mounted machinegun. If we ever doubted the potential of HALO, such doubt was laid to rest after watching the HALO movie at May's E3 with its bone-jarring action, vast battlefields, imaginative weapons, and mind-bendingly gorgeous graphics—good Lord, how long do we have to wait to play this one?

Fortunately, **X-COM: ALLIANCE** should give us the opportunity to bust open some alien heads while we wait. This first-person, UNREAL engine-powered game puts you in charge of a squad of Earthlings traveling to distant planets in an effort to eradicate that pesky alien menace once and for all. While research and skill development carries over from the original X-COM strategy game, the focus here is on real-time, RAINBOW SIX-style control of your commandos.

If you're dying for a classic X-COM challenge, you're in luck—the creators of the classic are hard at work on Bethesda's **THE DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE**. Taking place on an Earth already enslaved by aliens, you'll have to build a human resistance movement, seizing supplies, capturing towns, and researching alien technology as you work your way through


Anne McCaffrey's Freedom: First Resistance

an involved storyline incorporating two alien races and the shadowy Men in Black. What's not to love?

SOMETHING TO PROVE

Unfavorable comparisons to UNREAL TOURNAMENT may have prompted id Software to put some extra work into **QUAKE III: TEAM ARENA**. This add-on pack will deliver the non-deathmatch team games so noticeably absent from QUAKE III: ARENA, but we have to wonder if a handful of new weapons and three new games played on the same 12 symmetrical maps are going to be enough to reclaim the crown. Has id Software lost its Midas touch? We should know by Fall.

Activision is facing a somewhat similar uphill battle as well—can they (or anyone, for that matter) deliver a *Star Trek* game that doesn't suck? **STAR TREK: AWAY TEAM** is an X-COM-clone that puts gamers in charge of a group of Federation officers performing missions on a variety of alien worlds. The game's 18 missions will emphasize stealth and allow for multiple solutions. Away-teams will be created from a pool of 20 characters, each of which gains skills and experience with every successful mission.

A more traditional military game, **DELTA FORCE 3: LAND WARRIOR** seeks to put new light into this franchise's dimming star, courtesy of an honest-to-God 3D engine and some real command and control over your squadmates. DF3 will retain its globetrotting mission-based structure and is counting on Novalogic's strong online community to keep


Team Fortress 2

the DELTA FORCE series alive.

But it's going to be hard to beat Red Storm's (take a deep breath, now) **TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: COVERT OPERATIONS ESSENTIALS**. This stand-alone product offers nine new missions and builds on the RAINBOW SIX franchise by providing an entire CD's worth of covert op information, including detailed equipment specs, ballistic information, and video of real-life Spec Ops vets discussing their craft.

Red Storm is branching out in its other team-based title (take another deep breath) **ANNE MCCAFFREY'S FREEDOM: FIRST RESISTANCE**. This stealth-focused third-person action game has you (again) fighting evil enslaving aliens, but what makes it so appealing is the ability to jump among the different team members that accompany your principal character on every alien-busting mission. Eidos' **PROJECT EDEN** is a similarly futuristic, third-person game, letting you direct the actions of a team sent to rescue an engineer lost in a seedy *Judge Dredd*-ish city. Puzzle-solving and combat will challenge the resources of a team comprised of a commander, a hacker, an engineer, and the requisite Great Big Guy.

Game to Watch

FALLOUT TACTICS



Strip the quests and NPC interaction from *CGW* Hall of Famer FALLOUT and what do you have left? Something eerily similar to FALLOUT TACTICS. A squad-based ground combat game in the X-COM mold, FALLOUT TACTICS is set in the post-apocalyptic future, right between the two FALLOUT role-playing games. You are a member of the militaristic Brotherhood, sent on a mysterious mission that takes you to the ruins of what used to be Chicago. Once there, you'll fight mutants and the like as well as scavenge and repair new equipment and weapons.

While you are cast as one central character, there are around thirty NPCs available to fill out your squad. As in FALLOUT, you'll be able to customize your character with specialized skills, perks, and handicaps. Experience gained through the 38, branching, single-player missions lets your character gain new abilities and promises to deliver a different gaming experience for every player. While the turn-based FALLOUT combat system has been retained, you will have the option of a sort of "phased turn" system, where depleted action points slowly regenerate over time. Expect to see the six-player multiplayer games utilize this feature heavily.

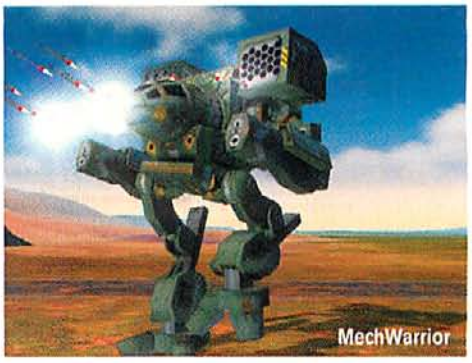
TOP 10 Games for Groupies

1. TEAM FORTRESS 2
2. TRIBES 2
3. HALO
4. DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE
5. FALLOUT TACTICS
6. X-COM ALLIANCE
7. COVERT OPS
8. ANNE MCCAFFREY'S FREEDOM: FIRST RESISTANCE
9. QUAKE III: TEAM ARENA
10. PROJECT EDEN

STAR WARS

'Mechs and Treks lead this year's assault on the final frontier

You don't need to be Marvin The Martian to enjoy an earth-shattering kaboom. You can make some yourself, first-hand, by blowing away some anonymous minion out in space (or in a gigantic robot). The space sim seems to be returning, with a wider variety of titles coming out this year as compared to most. Despite the less-than-stellar sales of games like FREESPACE 2, some companies are still willing to stick with it. Besides the mano-a-mano dogfighting games, there'll also be games that let you wage war from your comfy command seat.



MechWarrior

Game to Watch

FREELANCER

Forget PRIVATEER and the WING COMMANDERs. While those are classic games in every sense of the word, they were just warm-ups for Chris Roberts' upcoming magnum opus: FREELANCER. Imagine everything cool about his previous games all mixed into one uber-game, and you've got FREELANCER.

For one thing, you've got the story elements that make this more than just a dogfighting game. Various NPCs working for the four houses (or themselves) will offer you missions that you perform and get paid for. Mission types range from smuggling to escorting to reconnaissance. Use the money to buy yourself new gear, or perhaps dip into the economy by trading stuff left and right. The economy is dynamic, as missions you perform or events you partake in will affect production, which in turn affects demand and pricing. So, knocking off that lowly pirate may cause bullet prices to plummet. Add to that a massively-multiplayer component, and you've got quite a formula.





What worries us is the mouse-combat interface. The ship goes into autopilot, and you dictate which maneuvers to pull and where to shoot; all with the mouse? Let us keep our joysticks, please. The mouse-way sounds too dang weird. Also, we're still bummed that multiplayer won't ship right out of the box.

FIGHTIN' DOGS IN SPACE

One great sci-fi sim upcoming from Microsoft is **MECHWARRIOR 4**. The graphics alone look great, as the 'Mechs thunder around the beautiful terrain in FASA's own custom engine. Seeing a 'Mech ascend a ridge and then get greeted by rocket salvos was akin to looking at Gulf War footage. At press time, the team was focusing on the 'Mech Lab, as gamers have complained that it was too unintuitive to use.

If any space sim could dethrone either MECHWARRIOR 4

Independence War 2

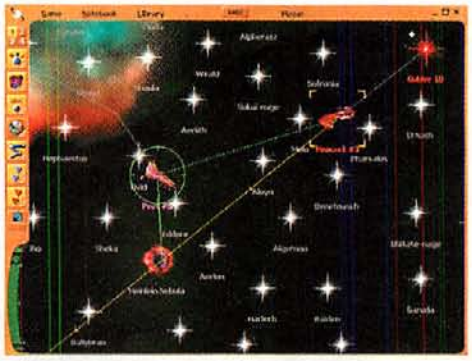


or FREELANCER, it'd be **INDEPENDENCE WAR 2: THE EDGE OF CHAOS**. *A lot* has been added since we last looked at it, mainly functioning combat. The graphics look a lot cleaner now, since they use Direct3D rather than Glide, and the HUD has been tightened up a lot. Also, since gamers had a bit of trouble adapting to the different stations, the interface has been streamlined significantly. The game will be more open-ended, going in the opposite direction from its more scripted predecessor. You'll have a few fixed missions, but otherwise, it's flexible enough where you can be either a dastardly pirate or a dashing revolutionary.

STAR TREK BRIDGE COMMANDER from Activision is a space sim from TIE FIGHTER guy Larry Holland that places you in command of your own Enterprise. On your 3D bridge, issue orders to crew members and watch as the bridge shakes during combat, consoles explode in a shower of sparks, and crew members get tossed like a croutons on a salad. Cardassians, Klingons, and Romulans all make appearances.

Game to Watch

STARS! SUPERNOVA



STARS! SUPERNOVA is the sequel to the hardcore favorite STARS! Initially a popular shareware title, STARS! was little more than repackaged when published by Empire Interactive in 1996. Now, the long-awaited sequel is nearly done, and SUPERNOVA looks worthy of standing alongside games like MASTER OF ORION and REACH FOR THE STARS. SUPERNOVA is a classic 4X space-empire game. You engage in diplomacy, wage war, claim planets, form alliances, research new technologies, design your ships, give them battle orders, spy on opponents, engage in trade, and more. There are more weapon types, more defense types, more battle devices, and new hull types in SUPERNOVA.

SUPERNOVA lets you play as one of 13 different alien races, each with their own special abilities—such as the Spy Masters who get better spies, or the Demolitionists who are quite adept at laying mines in space (and instigating those loud kabooms).

SUPERNOVA features new art and smarter AI to beef up the single-player game, but it's the multiplayer that always made STARS! special. You can play with up to 16 players over the Internet or by email. STARS! always played great but looked like a shareware game. No one will mistake SUPERNOVA for a shareware title.

Interestingly enough, good-looking space sims like USS VANGUARD and THE 10TH PLANET were "placed on hold." Their respective companies—Red Storm and Bethesda—are still going forward with their lighter, more action-oriented space games. Look for the beautiful but simple **BANG! GUNSHIP ELITE** from Red Storm come summer, and **ECHELON**, a planet-based sci-fi sim that will also emphasize action, from Bethesda.



SENSORS REVEAL TREK AND OTHER STRATEGY GAMES DECLOAKING

Plenty of this year's crop of space games will let you wage interstellar war on a grand scale. QUAKE was small potatoes; you kill a few hundred-thousand aliens, but you're still a space marine with a lousy pension. In these games you conquer the entire galaxy, and probably dust a few planets along the way. You're the emperor—even if you do have two heads, scales, and you reproduce by gazing longingly at some uncensored photos of broccoli. No one turns down your gold card, because, well, you rule.

Relive the last two seasons of the *Deep Space Nine* series in **DOMINION WARS**. You'll control up to six ships at once in the game's 30 missions, which allow you to play as the Federation and Klingons battling against the Cardassians, and the Dominion for control of the Alpha Quadrant. There are 20 different classes of starships as well, like the Defiant and Sovereign classes, and some never-before-seen designs.

STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS from Interplay is a ground-based, real-time strategy game set in the *Star Trek* universe. Play as the Federation, Klingons, or Romulans. As the goody two-shoes Feds, you have to behave ethically; set those phaser tanks to stun. The Klingon player gets to be more of a hardcase, but is still bound by honor. Only the Romulans get to act up. Enjoy the 3D graphics and follow our Prime Directive—only wear your official *Star Trek* jersey if no one's around!

O.R.B. from Strategy First is a 3D real-time strategy game that looks and plays a lot like HOMEWORLD (though it was underway before HOMEWORLD was published). You'll explore, mine, and defend mineral-rich asteroids in a rotating asteroid belt as you fight your enemies. The interface for this game might even be better than HOMEWORLD's.

NOBLE ARMADA, a 3D real-time strategy game based on Holistic's *Fading Suns* role-playing game, is seemingly trapped in a wormhole. Holistic was developing the game, but publisher Ripcord has taken it away from them and is looking for someone else to finish it. If we ever do see it, expect a game that features diplomacy and commerce as well as space combat.

Don't forget the expansion to *CGW* Strategy Game Of The Year HOMEWORLD, **HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM**. More than a mission pack, less than a fully-fledged sequel, this stand-alone game offers an even more compelling story, weirder and wilder ships, and a tweaked interface. Originally slated for spring, look for this one come fall.

Other cool space games on the distant horizon include **STAR WARS ONLINE** from Verant Interactive ("Let's make wookie, baby"), **MASTER OF ORION 3** (see Read.Me), and **MECHCOMMANDER 2** from Microprose, which looks like a MECHWARRIOR game for strategy lovers.

QUESTION 7

Where Are the Real Star Wars Games?

One noticeable omission: Except for one short remark, there's no mention of *Star Wars*. LucasArts used to be the master of this genre, and now, well, they ironically have no space-themed games (look for OBI-WAN in the "Single White Hero" section).

So, where're the *Star Wars* games? Two answers: on other platforms, and not at LucasArts.

We've heard hints about another *Star Wars* flying game. We did see STAR WARS EPISODE I: STARFIGHTER, which looked like a good space-combat game...for the PlayStation 2. A lot of the LucasArts *Star Wars* titles are console-only, ranging from their DEMOLITION title to their JEDI POWER BATTLES title. Looks like Lucas wants to hit the home market rather than the hardcore PC market.

The best looking *Star Wars* title for the PC was...BOMBAD RACER. What happened? Lack of development teams. The very people that made the *Star Wars* games instant gold are no longer involved. The JEDI KNIGHT team split up and its members are working on either VAMPIRE or NEW LEGENDS, while Larry Holland is doing *Star Trek* now. Guess it proves that the name alone is no longer enough to carry the game.

TOP 10 Games for Space Cadets

1. FREELANCER
2. STARS! SUPERNOVA
3. MECHWARRIOR IV
4. INDEPENDENCE WAR 2: THE EDGE OF CHAOS
5. O.R.B.
6. HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM
7. DOMINION WARS
8. STAR TREK BRIDGE COMMANDER
9. NOBLE ARMADA
10. STAR TREK: NEW WORLDS

CRITICAL MASS

Gaming marketeers go in quest of the mythical mass-market

Every month, they sit there at the top of the PC Data charts. You know the "games" we're talking about. They usually involve Barbie or hunting or both, and you can't find them anywhere but WalMart. We're talking about games that actually sell units and make a lot of money but don't do anything to progress PC gaming. This past year, those games had some competition from "real" games like ROLLER COASTER TYCOON and THE SIMS. Will games that appeal to gamers continue to stake out space on the best-seller list, or will the evil one known as Regis continue to reign?

THE SIMS is easily the franchise with the most prospective popular appeal, and the two major releases they have slated for next year should have all the boys and girls simming their little hearts out for quite sometime. By this Fall, you should be exploring new career tracks, architectural styles, and furniture in the official expansion pack, **THE SIMS: LIVIN' LARGE** (working title). Your Sims will experience all-new aspects of life when they are abducted by aliens, drink personality-altering potions mixed up in home-chemistry labs, or when they get too close to exploding garden gnomes. LIVIN' LARGE should help Will Wright keep his vision of a constantly-evolving-game alive. At least until Maxis' next big thing, SIMSVILLE, hits. On the grand Sim scale, **SIMSVILLE** falls somewhere in between the housebound THE SIMS and the citywide SIMCITY, letting you control a neighborhood.


The Sims: Livin' Large

The most frightening moment at this year's E3 Expo in Los Angeles wasn't that unpleasantness with Scooter and the goat; it was the announcement of **MYST III: EXILE** that put a shiver into this member of the gaming press. The MYST juggernaut controlled the PC-game sales charts like a digital *Dark Side of the Moon* a couple of years ago, so another installment in the gameplay-weak series could do the same, pushing more deserving titles out of the public eye. Still, the series could be freshened up a bit by the debut of new developers Presto Studios, better known for doing The JOURNEYMAN PROJECT games. Of course, they also did STAR TREK: HIDDEN EVIL, for whatever that's worth. The basic slideshow-with-clickable-hotspots gameplay is intact, but this time there will be more full-motion video. Brad Dourif, late of *Babylon 5*, will play a villain bent on destroying your old pal Atrus. The fun begins early next year.

Game to Watch

MONOPOLY TYCOON

While playing games on computers is still a niche hobby, you would have a hard time finding anyone who hasn't played a board game in their lifetime—and most people have played *Monopoly*. The Parker Bros. classic claims to be the best-selling board game of all time, but the question is, how does Hasbro translate that into a computer game that appeals to hardcore gamers? MONOPOLY TYCOON takes the basic gameplay concept of the board game—building a real estate empire—and sets it in a SIMCITY-like, real-time environment where people react to your properties in a living, breathing, fully-3D world. The timeline will progress from the 1930's all the way up to the present day, as you play through various scenarios or against up to three other players over LAN or Internet. MONOPOLY TYCOON seems like a can't-miss, considering the household-name status of the license, plus the proven popularity of Sim-type games. You'll be paying $200 to pass Go when Hasbro ships this title in October.



QUESTION 8

Why can't we just put the 70s behind us and move on?

Game companies think they've got us all figured out, don't they? We're all a bunch of losers who watched too much T.V. growing up, and they're going to exploit that. How else do you explain games like DUKES OF HAZZARD (1 and 2!), which one clueless E3 presenter described as "Rogue Spear in a car," or STARSKY AND HUTCH, which at least can associate itself with Antonio "Huggy Bear" Vargas, king of all pimps. A casual observer at E3 this year might have taken it for a 70's television convention, what with stars like Catherine "Daisy Duke" Bach, Vargas, and Gary Coleman drawing huge crowds.

When will the shmoes who run game companies figure out that good, quality games are what we want, not repackaged interactive versions of our childhood entertainment? If the continuing onslaught of crappy *Star Trek* games is any indication...never. Now they've moved on to PLANET OF THE APES, a license that was just screaming for the game treatment. What's next? A *Soylent Green* game? Get your stinkin' paws off our games, you damn dirty marketing weasals!







Feel the rush

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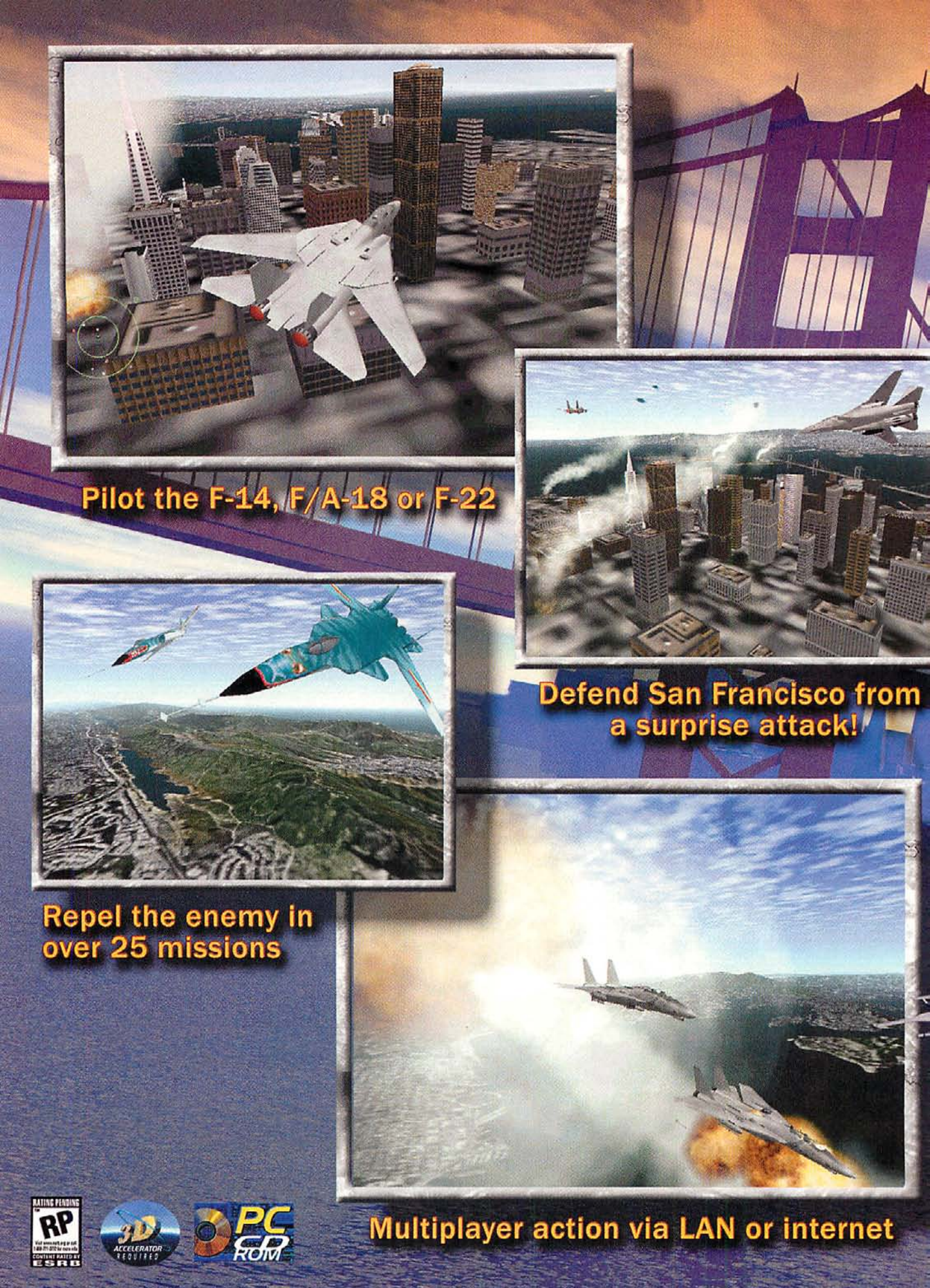
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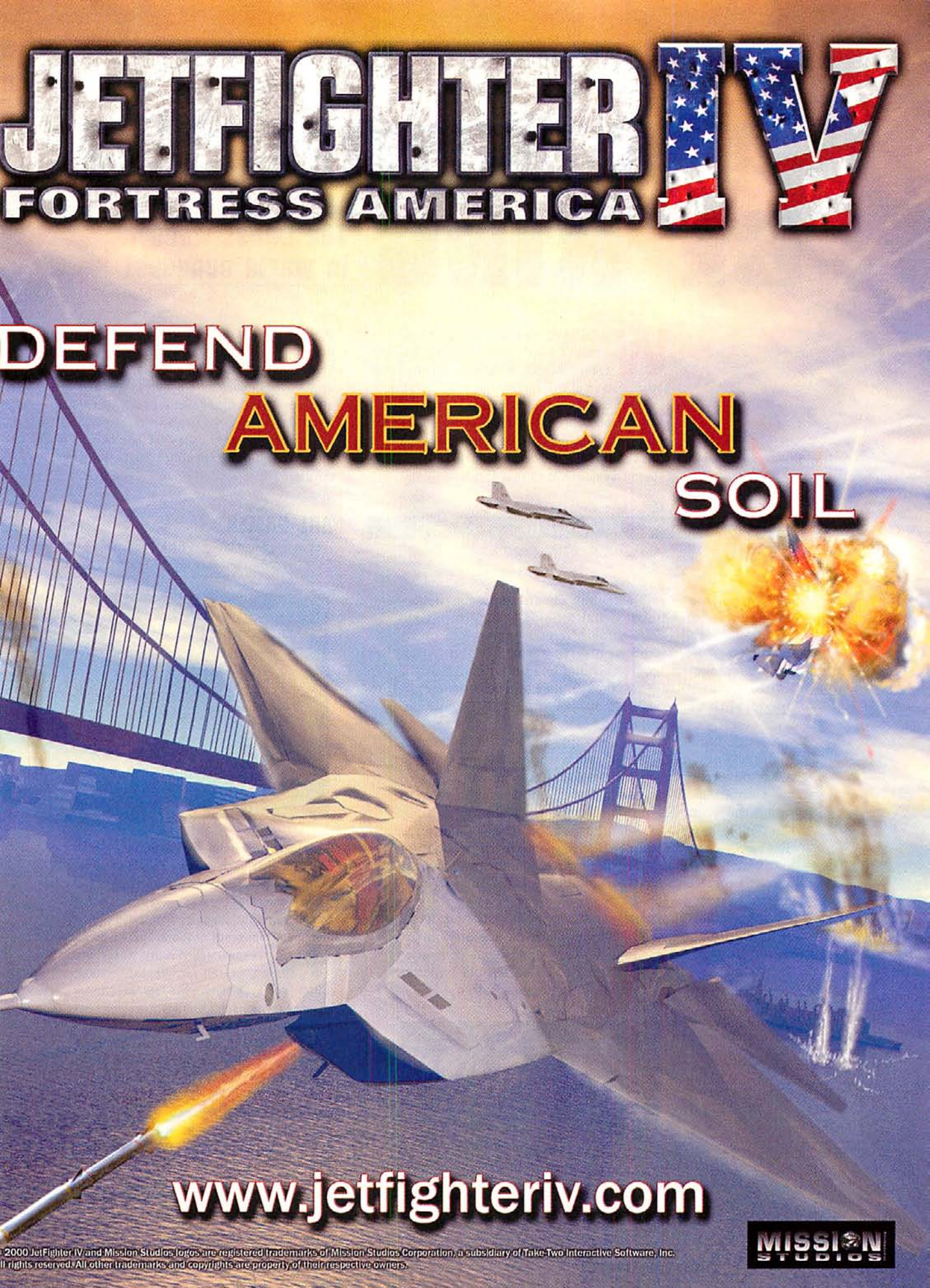
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IT'S GOOD TO BE KING

The latest word in world conquest

WARCRAFT III has undergone some changes, but the main focus is still on the tactical control of small groups of units in battle. Instead of throwing cannon fodder at your foe, players will have to micromanage their battles, casting spells and counter-spells at each other. The game's 3D world and characters look phenomenal, but don't expect this blockbuster until spring.

In the meantime, keep your eyes on BATTLE REALMS, the gorgeous Asian-style RTS being developed by Liquid Entertainment. BATTLE REALMS boasts a ton of innovations, including the ability to send troops through different dojos to create alchemical skill combinations. Like WARCRAFT III, you'll have fewer units to play with, so deciding what to do with those units—let them farm, or teach them to fight—will have critical implications for the game.

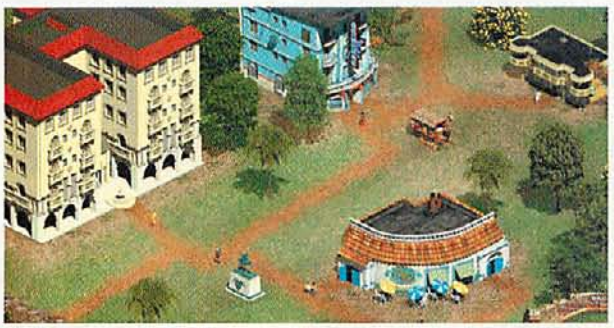
Game to Watch

TROPICO

Of all the possible realms for strategic conquest—from medieval battlefields to futuristic cityscapes— we think strategy gamers are going to flock like geese this winter to a small island in the Caribbean named Tropico. That's where the engineers of RAILROAD TYCOON 2 are creating a Latin American city-builder with a sense of humor—a sort of SIMCITY in Cuba, with a barrel of rum punch.

As the benevolent or corrupt dictator of a banana republic, you'll build the infrastructure to lift your people out of poverty, or to soak them for all they're worth. There are plantations, banks, resort hotels, and even brothels to prime the economic pump, but the trick will be keeping the people happy—or it's adios, amigo. The population is diverse, with each citizen having their own occupation and viewpoint, but if anyone starts making trouble, just toss their ass in jail (that should give you time to contribute to your Swiss 401k).

With wonderful art that captures the beauty and decay of its Caribbean setting, an emphasis on intrigue, and a clever balance between economic and social concerns, TROPICO looks like a refreshing twist on the old building theme. PopTop's brew should quench your thirst.



AGE GAMES

Even more ambitious is Rick Goodman's EMPIRE EARTH, shown publicly for the first time at E3.



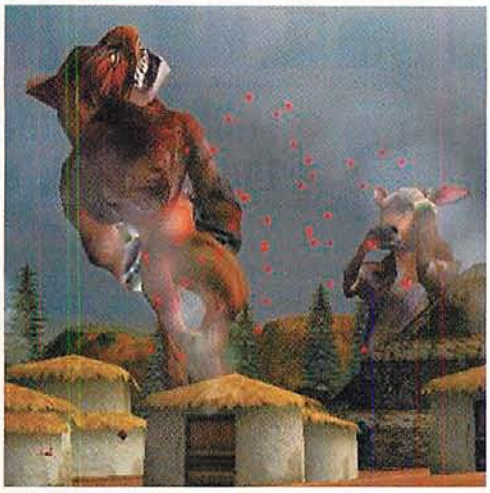
Goodman—one of the original designers of AGE OF EMPIRES—has been working on this game for two years, and it has another year to go before completion. EE combines the RTS gameplay of AGE OF EMPIRES with the scope of CIVILIZATION for a game that spans thousands of years. There'll be hundreds of unit types—spearmen, cavalry, musketeers, tanks, aircraft, aircraft carriers, subs, satellites, ICBMs, and even mech-style futuristic walkers. It's an immense project; fortunately, we don't have to play-balance it.

Speaking of AGE, Microsoft won't say what's up with AGE OF EMPIRES III, but the AGE II expansion is getting close. Like the THE RISE OF ROME, AGE OF EMPIRES II: THE CONQUERORS will introduce new units, civilizations, technologies, maps, and better AI. Four new historical campaigns will let AGE fans relive the glory of El Cid, Attila the Hun, Montezuma, and Eric the Red.

RED ALERT II is another big-name RTS that's been in the news lately. The focus this time is on fast-and-furious battles with a ton of new units. The game already looks better than TIBERIAN SUN, but

Game to Watch

BLACK & WHITE



The gods continue to smile on strategy fans. Assuming, of course, that you're not a turn-based strategy fan. Would-be world conquerors should have no shortage of titles to exercise their territorial ambitions in the coming months.

Last year, we said that BLACK & WHITE was one of five games that will change gaming, and after seeing it again at E3, we're even more convinced. The latest game from the legendary Peter Molyneux (POPULOUS, THEME PARK, DUNGEON KEEPER) has all of the trademarks of a Molyneux design: originality, beauty, freedom, and the ability to mercilessly screw with your subjects. You can be as good (white) or bad (black) as you like, and the consequences affect everything from the look of the world to the population's behavior to the actions of an anthropomorphic beast you raise to gigantic proportions.

The game has changed recently with the addition of situations that pose moral challenges. These add some needed structure to the game, but you're still free to choose whether to help your subjects or ignore them. See our in-depth story next month for more on this groundbreaking title.



Westwood's got a lot to make up for. See our preview this month for more.

If you like C&C-style games, Verant Interactive (EVERQUEST) has a doozy on the way. **SOVEREIGN** is the first massively-multiplayer 3D strategy game, allowing up to 500 people to play simultaneously in a single game. Players roam the planet building cities, airbases, and seaports; deploying massive armies; launching air and land attacks with nuclear or chemical weapons. Check it out at **www.station.sony.com**.

OF STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

CAESAR III and PHAROAH fans should look out for Impression's next city-builder, **ZEUS: MASTER OF OLYMPUS**. Set in ancient Greece, Zeus serves up a world filled with heroes, gods, and other mythological creatures. Most of the scenarios can be played in less than an hour, if you're hankering for a quickie.

KINGDOM UNDER FIRE (G.O.D.) and **WARLORDS 4** (SSI) both combine strategy and RPG elements. KINGDOM UNDER FIRE borrows liberally from WARCRAFT II, STARCRAFT, and DIABLO to pull you through a deep fantasy story. WARLORDS 4 will return to its turn-based roots, and the combat will go tactical *a la* AGE OF WONDERS.





Don't expect to see **SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION III** anytime soon. Sid is rebuilding the CIV III team, while he ponders the creation of **DINOSAURS!** While you're waiting, check out the sequel to Activision's CIV knockoff, **CALL TO POWER 2**. With a laundry list of improvements—such as built-in scenarios and a new diplomatic model—CTP 2 promises to be a much stronger game than the original.

QUESTION 9

Wither goes the real-time strategy game?

Two years ago we were drowning in real-time strategy games; this year there are about a dozen. What happened? In the stampede of WARCRAFT II and COMMAND & CONQUER imitators, most never stood out from the crowd.

Publishers now know that RTS games aren't a sure thing. They have to look great, play well, and have a unique hook. Those hooks vary from going massively multiplayer (SOVEREIGN) to broadening the scope (EMPIRE EARTH) to refining the original idea (WARCRAFT III, BATTLE REALMS). But the biggest trend you'll see in the next few years is true 3D environments, like those in DARK REIGN 2 and SHOGUN. By maneuvering units through 3D worlds, taking advantage of terrain and line-of-sight, strategists will face new challenges in ever-more immersive environments. In two years, the wave of WARCRAFT III imitators will all be 3D.

TOP 10 Games for Would-Be Conquerors

1. TROPICO
2. BLACK & WHITE
3. WARCRAFT 3
4. BATTLE REALMS
5. AGE 2: THE CONQUERORS
6. RED ALERT 2
7. SOVEREIGN
8. ZEUS: MASTER OF OLYMPUS
9. CALL TO POWER 2
10. EMPIRE EARTH

WORLD AT WAR

Military simulations in the air, land, and sea

Flight simulations and wargames have fallen out of favor recently, as publishers pursue greener pastures in other genres. But they're not dead yet. Like Britons during the bombing of London, the survivors grow more resolute. Military-sim developers are starting to offer more varied gameplay options to appeal to a wider audience (B-17 and DESTROYER COMMAND are good examples).

World War II continues to be the most popular era for flight sims. For sheer drama, you can't do better than **BATTLE OF BRITAIN**, Rowan Software's current project. Rowan—creators of *CGW*'s 1999 Sim of the Year, MiG ALLEY—wants you to relive the desperate air war of 1940, with detailed simulations of 1,000 Luftwaffe raids. You can play either side of the conflict, from a cockpit or strategic command, in furballs with up to 1,000 aircraft at once—heavens!


Battle of Britain

You'll find more WWII action in Microsoft's **COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2**, a Pacific War sim with story-driven campaigns, linked by a narrative and graphic novel-style artwork. The intent is to try to involve the player emotionally in the action, to feel what it's like to put your life—and the lives of your wingmen—on the line. The game is looking great; the planes are detailed down to the rivets and paint chips.

EA supposedly has a WWII flight sim in the works, **ATTACK SQUADRON**, based on Looking Glass Studios' FLIGHT UNLIMITED III. But they didn't show it at E3, and they're reluctant to disclose any details. This was the same kind of prelude to Jane's A-10 WARTHOG, which was then subsequently can-

Game to Watch

B-17 FLYING FORTRESS II

B-17 II is the bomb. This sim not only looks awesome, it has a unique hook for multiplayer gamers: You and up to 10 others can each man a position on the flying fort, hosing off pesky Krauts with those hefty 50-calibers. You'll also have P-51s as fighter escorts to help see your mission through. Both the Me-109s and P-51s will be flyable, making multiplayer games all the more interesting.





Each crew position has been painstakingly detailed, from pilot to tail gunner. Particularly impressive is the bombardier's station, where the Norden bombsight is beautifully rendered. There's an additional control panel for the bombardier where he opens the bay doors, arms ordnance, and then takes control of the plane to guide it for targeting. Once lined up, the payload is dropped and the ship races for home. A sophisticated damage model will make the return trip a white-knuckler if you've sustained flak damage or been torn up by Me-109s.

Bombers haven't been very appealing in the past, since they're generally heavy, slow, and vulnerable. But as we'll soon discover, the B-17 was more than capable of defending itself. We can't wait to climb into the ball turret.



Combat Flight Simulator 2

celled last year.

The most ambitious game in this category is probably **WWII ONLINE**, being developed by former members of iMagic. WWII ONLINE will attempt to model the entire battlefield: tanks, planes, infantry, ships—you name it. A ladder system confers more resources and better equipment on successful commanders. It'll enter open-beta soon.

COMMANCHE VS. HOKUM has a similarly broad scope, modeling hundreds of combatants, but in a modern setting with helicopter gunships in the lead role. Like its acclaimed predecessor, APACHE VS. HAVOC, CvH generates highly dynamic scenarios that make you feel as if there's an actual war going on. CvH should be out by the time you read this. Fixed-wing fans should watch the skies for **FLANKER 2.5**, which adds a naval war component to FLANKER 2.0, as well as a flyable MiG 29K (naval variant) to the mix.

OUT TO SEA

There are three naval combat games in store from SSI this year. Perhaps the most interesting is **DESTROYER COMMAND**, a combination sim, strategy, and action game that lets you control a WWII destroyer or destroyer escort. You can direct the action, or take control of the 5-inch guns, anti-aircraft cannon, torpedoes, or depth charges—and unleash hell on enemy U-boats, ships, aircraft, or ground forces. See our preview in this issue.

SSI is designing DESTROYER COMMAND to work with SILENT HUNTER II in multiplayer mode. Imagine depth-charging your buddy while he tries to line you up for a torpedo shot. Unfortunately, the sub sim ran aground recently, and had to go in search of a new publisher. **LARRY BOND'S HARPOON 4** appears on track, however. HARPOON 4 preserves the series' rigorously accurate approach to combat simulation, modeling more than 1,000 ships, submarines, aircraft, and ground formations from 14 countries. But they're trying to make the game more accessible, with a new point-and-click interface and pretty 3D graphics. With Larry Bond's name on it, this will surely be one to watch.



Destroyer



Harpoon 4

GRUNT WORK

SSI will also publish another CLOSE COMBAT game entitled **UTAH BEACH**. There are no changes in store for the engine or interface, so hopefully Atomic will focus on the AI. The series is losing its appeal, though, and D-Day invasions are getting a bit overdone.

You'll find a fresher WWII tactical approach in CDV's **SUDDEN STRIKE**. Once you get past the concept that it was developed in Germany and its initials are SS, this game has magnetic appeal—incredibly detailed graphics, huge numbers of units, and deformable environments. Combat is basically COMMAND & CONQUER with WWII-type units, but if you don't care about realism, you'll have a ball.

Hasbro's **SQUAD LEADER** is nearly the opposite. It's slow, cumbersome, and dated-looking (owing to a four-year old engine), but it's designed to appeal to turn-based tactical buffs. Unfortunately, fans of ADVANCED SQUAD LEADER, on which the game is based, consider it more X-COM than ASL. If turn-based realism is your thing and you're ready to enter the world of 3D, check out COMBAT MISSION instead (**battlefront.com**).



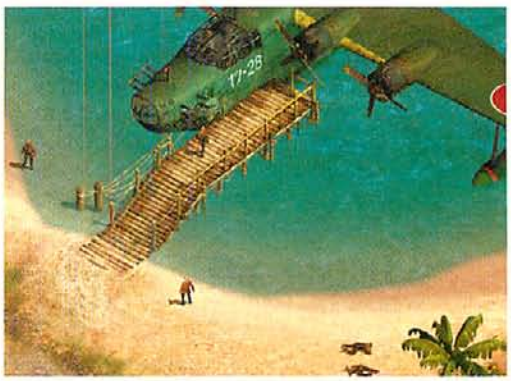
Sudden Strike

For serious wargamers, there's not much left other than Breakaway Games' **WATERLOO**, an honest-to-God Napoleonic wargame based on the award-winning Sid Meier's GETTYSBURG/ANTIETAM engine. It will have all the realism of the earlier games, plus historically accurate uniforms, cavalry charges, infantry squares, and appealing animations. It's sure to be the best Napoleonic game on the market this Christmas.

Game to Watch

COMMANDOS 2

COMMANDOS 2 could be the poster child for sequels that overshadow their predecessors. It was easily one of the best-looking games at E3, with enormously detailed scenes that looked like they were ripped from old war movies. The gameplay is as lush as the graphics, with detailed missions behind enemy lines in European, Pacific, and Asian settings. You'll use your team of commandos to blow bridges, infiltrate Nazi submarine bases, and, of course, find and rescue a special Private from the hot-n-heavy French frontlines. More realistic AI, new characters, and tons of vehicles to control and heavy weapons to man will make COMMANDOS 2 a real killer.



TOP 10 Games for Military Buffs

1. B-17 FLYING FORTRESS
2. COMMANDOS 2
3. BATTLE OF BRITAIN
4. COMBAT FLIGHT SIM 2
5. COMMANCHE VS. HOKUM
6. WWII ONLINE
7. DESTROYER COMMAND
8. COMBAT MISSION
9. HARPOON 4
10. WATERLOO

ROAD WARRIORS

Sit down, shut up, and hang on.

Whether you're a dyed-in-the-wool simulation fanatic, a speed-loving arcade wizard, or a destructive swervedriver, the current crop of driving and racing games in development for the PC right now are sure to offer something to your liking.

LICENSE AND REGISTRATION, PLEASE

Sim-heads are dying to play one game above all others: **NASCAR RACING 4**, from Papyrus Studios and Sierra. The already-superb physics engine has been further improved, but most stunning are the graphics—thanks to photorealistic reflection-mapping and light-sourcing. Breathing down Sierra's neck is Hasbro, with their entry from Monster Games, **NASCAR HEAT**. While HEAT doesn't quite match up to the extreme realism in NASCAR RACING 4, it makes up for it with interesting gameplay modes like the mission-based single-player Beat the Heat, and Race With The Pros—a series of races against ghost cars, recorded from actual runs made by pro drivers like Bobby Labonte. Expect both titles to arrive this Fall.

This year marks the return of F1 racing to the United States, so expect it to be the next big racing license for the PC platform (not to mention the numerous next-generation console titles). Hasbro Interactive is relying on the copious talents of Geoff Crammond, creator of FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX and GRAND PRIX 2, to deliver the most notable title in the field, **GRAND PRIX 3**. The five levels of difficulty and various driver-assist options should please the newbies, the grognards, and everyone in between. For a more American take on open-wheel racing, check out **INDY RACING 2000** from Infogrames and Real Sports, which will of course allow you to race in one of America's oldest and most famous auto races. Another officially-licensed racing product to look for is **NHRA DRAG RACING** from Motorsims, a nitro-burning speedfest with plans for an extensive online racing element, including online leagues and tournaments.


NASCAR RACING 4

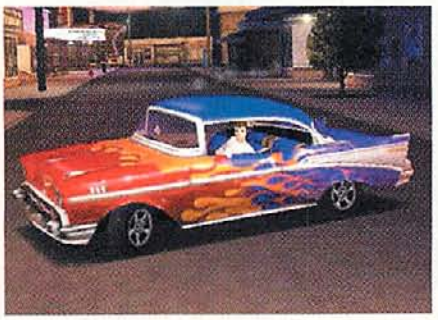
HIT AND RUN

If driving recklessly around city streets down narrow alleys and through rush-hour traffic is more your idea of driving excitement, then be sure to check out **WORLD'S SCARIEST POLICE CHASES** from Fox Interactive. Exploiting the license of one of Fox's most popular "reality" television shows, you'll be able to play as a cop or a criminal through 50+ missions, interspersed with commentary from Sheriff John Bunnell himself. If you're looking to do a little less law-breaking, **MIDTOWN MADNESS 2** from Microsoft will give drivers the option of racing around realistic (if somewhat compressed) maps of San Francisco or London.

Strangely, the one saving grace of the current LucasArts lineup—aside from ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND—is the cartoonish **SUPER BOMBAD RACING**, which takes the superb EPISODE ONE: RACER and puts a MARIO KART spin on it. The super-deformed, childlike versions of Sebulba and Darth Maul are cuuuuute, but the gameplay looks like a good time, especially in multiplayer. Who needs real-world physics when you can slam Jar-Jar into a wall at 400 MPH? CGW

Game to Watch

NEED FOR SPEED: MOTOR CITY



The golden age of the American automobile is one of those eras that will live on in history for years after the last '57 Chevy has rusted to dust, thanks in large part to movies like *American Graffiti*, T.V. shows like *Happy Days*, and now games like NEED FOR SPEED: MOTOR CITY. In NFS:MC, you'll live an online life not as an Elf or Rogue, but as a grease monkey—modifying, repairing, and racing a hot rod on the streets of a virtual city for money, pride, and sometimes pink slips. The title has come a long way since we first saw it back at last year's E3, with significant improvements to the graphics engine, along with a move towards online-only gameplay. NFS: MC will be an interesting experiment to see if genres other than RPGs (even though NFS:MC has a definite RPG element when it comes to improving your car's attributes over time) can succeed as persistent online universes. We wonder which has more charisma points, a '69 Camaro SS or a '70 Mustang Mach 1?

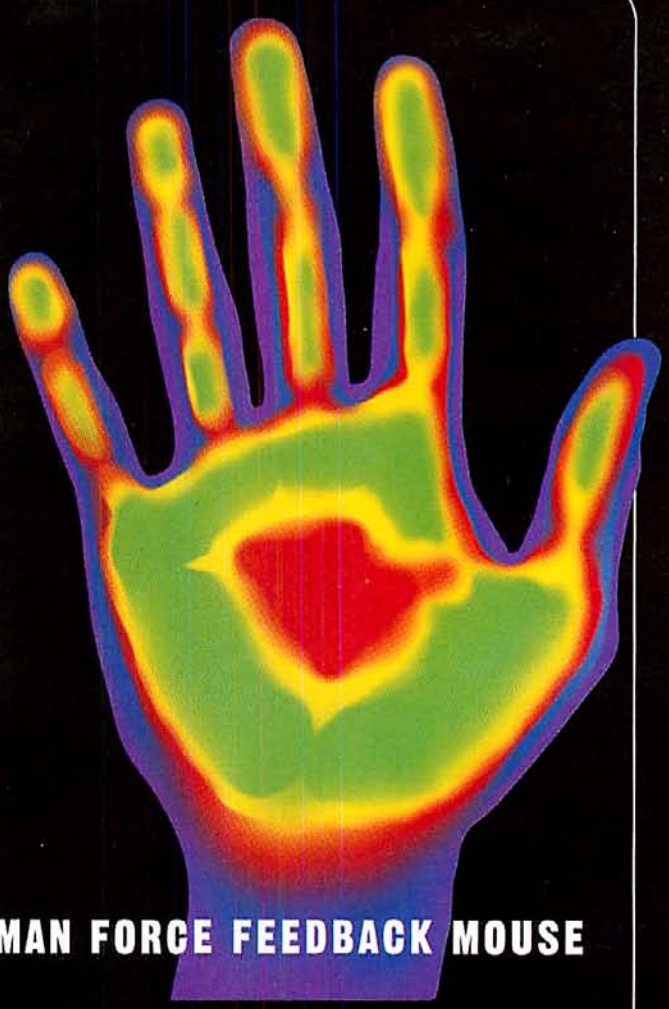
TOP 10 Games for Racing Fans

1. NFS: MOTOR CITY
2. NASCAR RACING 4
3. GRAND PRIX 3
4. NASCAR HEAT
5. SUPER BOMBAD RACING
6. MIDTOWN MADNESS
7. 4X4 EVOLUTION
8. NHRA DRAG RACING
9. INDY RACING 2000
10. WORLD'S SCARIEST POLICE CHASES

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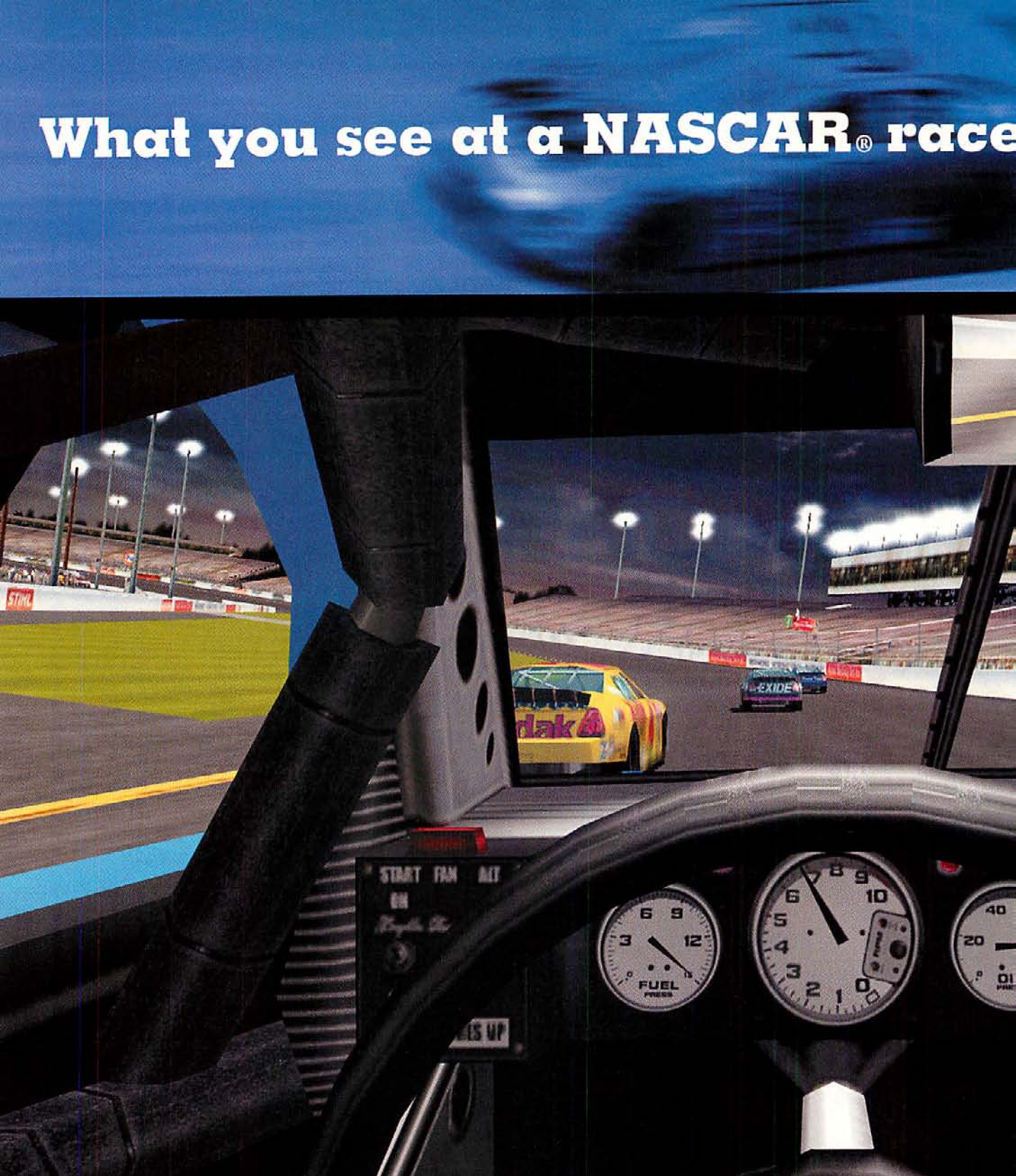
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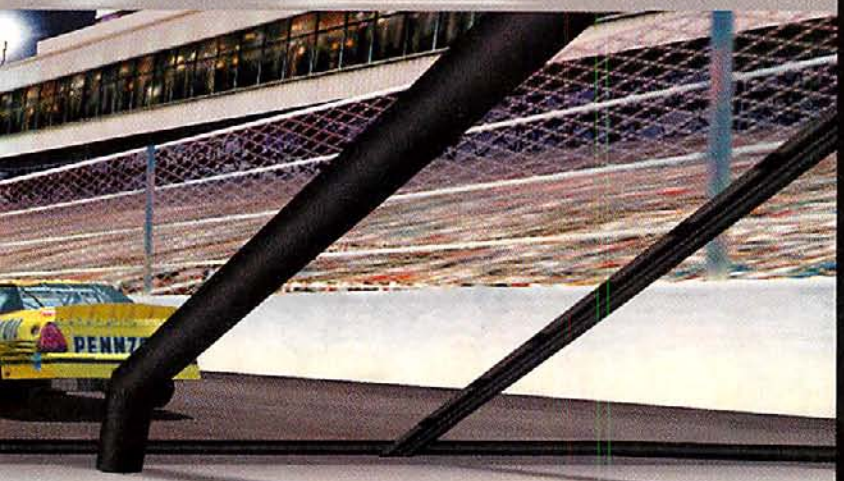
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really depends on where you sit.













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NASCAR® Racing 4

C&C: RED ALERT 2

GENRE: Real-Time Strategy • RELEASE DATE: Q4 00

PUBLISHER: EA Games • DEVELOPER: Westwood Studios

CONTACT: www.westwood.com



Is there life left in the C&C universe?

IRON CURTAIN CALL

by Robert Coffey

COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN was a very...um...*adequate* product. There was nothing wrong with it exactly, it just seemed that after four years of hype and anticipation that there should have been something more to the game. Sure, it sold like three bazillion copies, but the tepidness of most gamers' reactions makes you wonder if Westwood Studios' signature franchise was more bruised than bolstered by the release.

Now comes RED ALERT 2, the sequel to the C&C spinoff that was more popular than the original game. Will RED ALERT 2 revitalize C&C's good name? Or is it a rote rehash, the last gasp of a dying, outdated product line trotted out like a diseased, painted, Tijuana donkey to hustle up whatever dollars it can?

Alt.History.Coldwar

One thing is certain: Westwood isn't about to radically revamp the gameworld. RED ALERT 2 takes place after the alternative WWII-ish events of the previous game. The Soviets have lost, the U.S. is enjoying their booming prosperity, and all seems right with the world. Could anyone be any happier? Well, sure, the Soviets could—they got crushed, remember? Russia's new leader, the duplicitous Romanov, has a PhD in Grudge Holding and is secretly rebuilding the Soviet Union into a devastating war machine. As the game begins, Romanov orders his overwhelming forces to invade the United States, plunging the world into war once again and forcing America to do what it has never done: ask for Europe to bail its ass out.

A series of tutorial missions will prep players for the roughly 12 missions (Soviet and Allied) per side the game will offer. Once the action starts, the game will focus on the fast-paced action that distinguished the first RED ALERT from C&C. Players will be harvesting ore, plopping down buildings, and churning out units from the get-go. Many of your favorite units make return appearances from the first game—scads of tanks, Tanya, Tesla coils—and since the game utilizes the TIBERIAN SUN engine, it will have a very familiar look as well (though the art has been cleaned up for a less-gritty, more lively feel).

Shouldn't They Be Calling It Tiberian Alert 2, Then?

With so much familiar stuff returning, you might think that Westwood was playing it fatally safe. The good news is, they aren't. Granted, the look, focus, and milieu of the game haven't undergone any radical changes, but after spending a few hours playing RED ALERT 2, I can say it looks to be a better balanced, more inventive game—and at least as much fun to play.

A large part of the fun comes with the design team's taking the "What If" nature of the first game's technology, and really running with it. There are loads of new units and almost all of them are not what you'd expect. For example, the Tesla Coil is back, but this time the technology has spread to the infantry in the form of Tesla Troopers—the ultimate shock troop. Toting around the same electric death rays that the defensive Coils pack, Tesla Troopers are murder against RED ALERT's signature assortment of tanks; in groups of three, they can supercharge Coils for added range and the ability to fire even when your power supply goes out.

The Allies have their own version of this in the Prism Cannon, a defensive tower that blasts a bouncing beam of chromatic light at enemies. Working together, a number of Prism Cannons can create a vicious defense, and—in answer to the Soviets' Tesla Troopers—this technology has been strapped onto a new slow-firing tank unit that is absolutely brutal, even in small numbers. Other new structures include the Allied Weather Control Device that unleashes a viciously destructive electrical storm on enemies, and the Soviet Iron Curtain that slaps a force-field on all units within its range, rendering them immune to attack.

The bottom line is that the entire game wallows happily in a sea of fantastic units. Giant mind-controlled squids terrorize the seas, schools of dolphins unleash ship-sinking sonic-amplifier attacks, time-jumping Chrono Legionnaires erase enemies from the timeline, and psychic Yuri units can either seize control of Allied units or lash out with a nasty psychic wave to kill infantry. How wild can the units get? The Soviet Crazy Ivan unit can strap a bomb on anything—be it an enemy Construction Yard, or a wandering cow that would be perfect for a bovine kamikaze attack.

As fun as all these units should be, it's a focused fun hell-bent on balancing the game better than Westwood's last couple of RTS titles. Every unit has a counter, and every counter has *its* counter, forcing players to use combined forces and to rely less on the heavy-handed tank rushes that dominated RED ALERT. About those tanks—one unit, the Terror Drone, has been created specifically to counteract them. It's

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EXCUSEZ-MOI No snobby French waiter can hold a candle to an Eiffel Tower turned gigantor Tesla Coil.



STOCKYARD SLAUGHTER The ability to garrison infantry in RED ALERT 2's neutral buildings means that even an innocent farmhouse could be a palace of death.



an anti-armor mechanical spider, and each one of these babies can take out a tank all by itself.

See the World—Then Blow It Up

The fantastic nature of the units spreads to the gameworld as well. Instead of taking place in the nondescript, generic maps of the first game, battles in RED ALERT 2 will make heavy use of world landmarks. You'll defend the White House, blow up the Statue of Liberty, and transform the "Paris Tower" (incredibly, there's a copyright on the name "Eiffel Tower") into one big-ass Tesla Coil.

So is RED ALERT 2 going to revolutionize RTS gaming? Nope. Not even close. But to their credit, Westwood isn't even making those claims. Their goal is to make the best RED ALERT they can. At this juncture, it looks like they are pretty much on track and set to deliver the goods that went AWOL in TIBERIAN SUN. There are a few questionable artifacts from TIBERIAN SUN—unit veterancy in a game that stresses throwing hordes of units against each other is admirable, but not practical—but RED ALERT 2 seems to be dodging the bullets the other title took. You need look no further than the game's revamped, *very* user-friendly interface to see that this design team is at least willing to meet gamers halfway and acknowledge that the C&C model could use some tweaking, that it isn't the shining paragon of all RTS gaming.

With COMMAND & CONQUER: RENEGADE slated for release this winter as well, this could be a make-or-break holiday season for the crown jewel of Westwood Studios. CGW

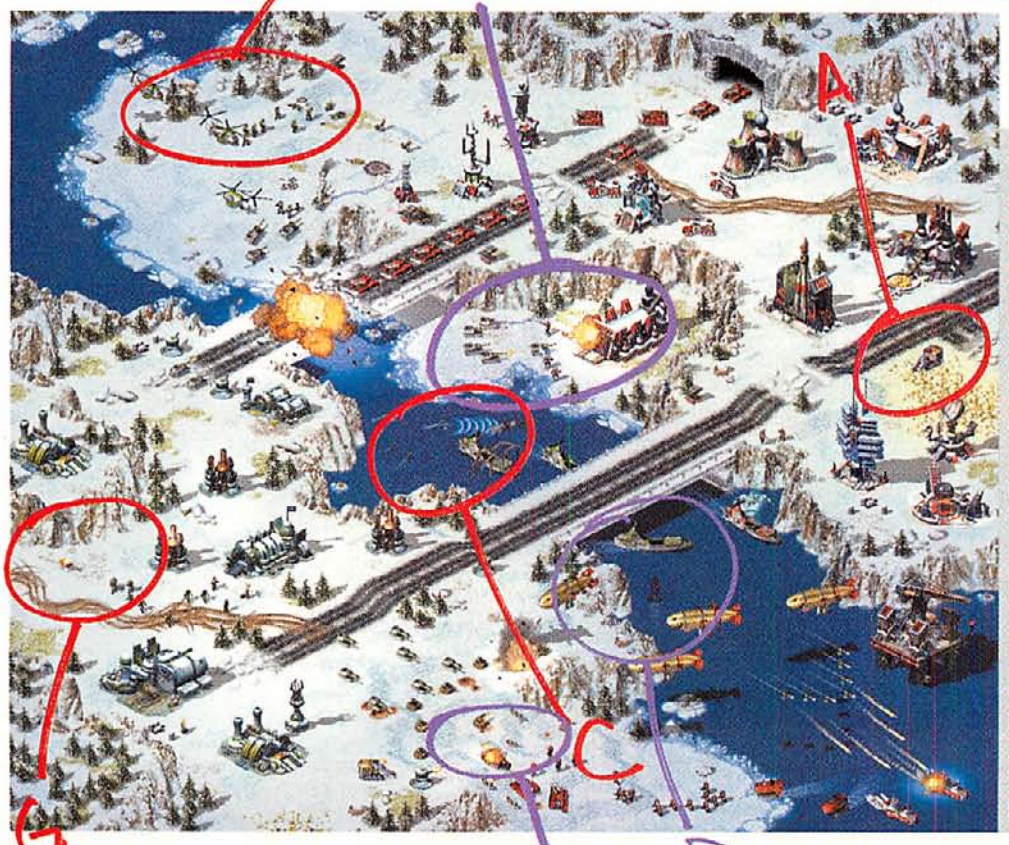




DEFENDERS OF LIBERTY Allied forces will have to defend national treasures like the Statue of Liberty and the White House from Soviet forces.

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE These Allied Prism Tanks are doing a great job of wiping out these Soviet defenders, but they're not in time to stop the Nuke launch.





THE VERY BIG PICTURE

A. Soviet harvesters have mounted guns for protection. Throw in teleporting Allied harvesters and no more cheap harvester-killing wins.

B. A squad of Tesla Troopers takes on some tanks.

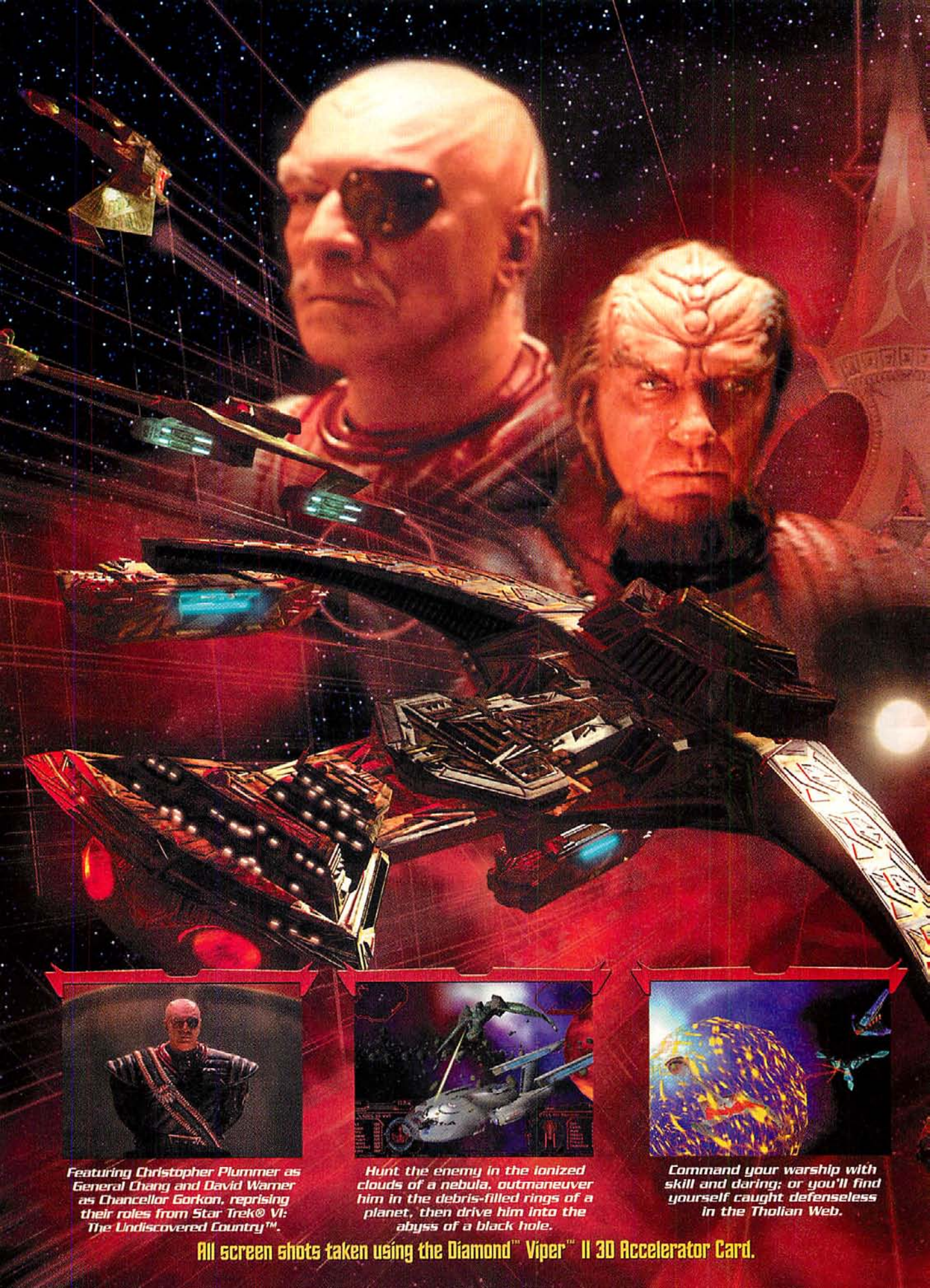
C. Giant Soviet squids attack Allied carriers while a school of augmented dolphins tries to defend.

D. A Soviet Typhoon Sub, undetectable by most units, moves in for the kill.

E. Allied helicopters drop off infantry and engineers for a base invasion.

F. Not only do these guard dogs kill infantry quickly, in guard mode they'll protect your base from spy infiltration.

G. Harmless cow or bovine killer? You won't see the bombs Crazy Ivan plants on livestock until they go off.



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HOW DO WE RATE?



Outstanding The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.



Very Good Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

Average Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.



Weak Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.





Abysmal The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

We reviews only finished games– no betas, no patches.

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2

Rainbow Studios delivers dirtbike divinity

Berm Baby, Berm

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

NAC NAC. WHO'S THERE? Stunts - like this Heel Clicker - are a huge part of MCM2, with a play mode dedicated to them, plus the ability to earn bonuses in career mode.



RACING
reviewed by Tom Price

If you're expecting me to take MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 to task for being too unrealistic or not enough of a hardcore driving sim because this is *CGW*, and that's what the old farts at *CGW* do, then forget it. The game offers way too much fun and excitement through its suprisingly varied gameplay and its beautifully-rendered graphics to hang a simple "arcade racer" badge on it and be done. Just repeat after me: This is not a sim, this is not a sim...

Crowd Pleaser

What elevates MCM2 above the level of "cartoonish arcade racer" is the immediate visceral punch it delivers. More than a few times, my stomach actually sank when my bike catapulted me to an absurd altitude, and something else on my body definitely retracted in fear when I hit the valley below. Crowds of people congregate around the monitor every time MCM2 is booted up and shout "oooh," "aaah," and "iAy, me juevos!" This is a great game to show off to your friends and family–not just for its amazing graphics, but for pure entertainment value. Some grognards might balk at the ability to catch completely ridiculous air and to land jumps that in the real world would result in your bike's rear shock absorber giving you a colonoscopy. But just one Evil Knieval-style wipeout, and they'll be laughing like school girls.

Nobody's Perfect

Not that MCM2 is without faults. The career mode (Pro Circuit) has an interesting framework, but fails to really give you any sense of progress or accomplishment. There's no true sense of reward as you pass each stage of the

CGW RATED

PROS
Addictively fun gameplay and a beautiful graphics engine.

CONS
Spotty career mode.

Requirements: Pentium-II 233MHz, 64 MB RAM, 200 MB install.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium-II 300MHz, 64 MB RAM, 593 MB install.
3D Support: Direct3D. **Multiplayer Support:** Modem, serial, LAN, MSN Gaming Zone.

Publisher: Microsoft • **Developer:** Rainbow Studios • **$40** • **www.microsoft.com/Games/motocross2**
ESRB Rating: Everyone

NUTCRACKER New Helmet: $50. Replacement forks: $150. Torn leathers: $100. Wrapping your legs around a saguro cactus: priceless.



pro-circuit mode, nor is there much challenge to staying afloat money-wise. You start out with $50,000, a choice between three different low-end bikes, and a few uniforms pulled right from the bathroom hamper. Each race you run has an entrance fee and, assuming you crash a few times (and you will) or just land hard (and you will), repair and medical bills. The repair and medical bills aren't itemized, so you don't know what specifically is wrong. Bent forks? Bent legs? Your post-race summary doesn't say, it just gives you a dollar value. It's a bit hard to suspend disbelief when you and your bike incur thousands of dollars in costs, but you finish the race just as strongly as you started it. If your medical bill is too large, then there's no way you're finishing a race conscious.

The first level of the pro-circuit type will have you racing through Enduros and Bajas, which are large open areas with gates scattered around marking the track. You have to hit the gates in order, but the route you take to each gate is up to you. There is usually an obvious route that is devoid of obstructions like trees and buildings, but it usually takes longer than the short cuts that require more advanced riding skills. Pointing you in the right direction is a little 3D arrow in the corner of your screen. These tracks are very much in the traditional-racing vein, where you find the quickest line through turns and you use the inside to your advantage. The environments – from Central American jungle to snowy ski resorts to rural farmland – are wonderfully rendered and have surprises around every corner. They're also filled with animated obstacles like cars, farm equipment, trains, and (believe it or not) airplanes that sometimes fly a little too close to the airspace around your jumps.

After you finish the Enduro and Baja levels, you'll move on to Nationals – a series of outdoor tracks with stricter boundaries and manicured jumps. Nationals requires an entirely different style of riding that is less about all-out speed (like the enduros), and demands a more technical knowledge of jumps and how to land them. You have to hit jumps just right, with sufficient speed to make it to the backside of the next one (which may actually be three berms away) and maintain a constant rhythm throughout, otherwise you'll roll over every single bump with no room to get up the sufficient speed. Finding the up/down line in addition to

RECOMMENDED GEAR

Logitech Wingman Digital Extreme



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Even more frustrating, there are some brief, fleeting moments when DAIKATANA actually flirts with fun, but playing this game for those few, precious moments is akin to eating your way through a dumptruck full of dead mice for the $20 bill buried at the bottom.

— Robert Coffey, reviewing DAIKATANA.

Music to My Ears

By Tom Price

Some people can't stand game-music and rush to turn it off the first time they boot up a game. I, on the other hand, love listening to music while I'm gaming—though usually not the music included by the game designers. Not to say that all original game-music is bad or annoying; HOMEWORLD used somber symphonic music quite well to convey mood and atmosphere, and the upcoming CRIMSON SKIES is filled with swinging period tunes.

But when I'm playing a game, I like to pop one of my favorite CD's in the discman as an alternate soundtrack. While playing MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 lately, I've been hooked on one of my favorite band's "best of" record: *Death To The Pixies*. Songs like "Broken Face," "Gouge Away," and "Monkey Gone to Heaven" not only provide a rocking soundtrack, but also a perfect backdrop to all those Knieval-esque crashes. Back when I was playing the original TOMB RAIDER, cranking Cypress Hill's *Temples of Boom* was the only thing that kept me sane as I toiled through. I'm not sure if listening to The Gravediggaz's *Pick, The Sickle & The Shovel* helped me maintain any sanity while playing DUNGEON KEEPER 2, but that wasn't really the point.

If you've ever replaced a game's soundtrack with one of your own, or can think of a clever or appropriate game/album matchup, drop me a line at **tom_price@ziffdavis.com**. I'll be here, rockin' with Dokken.

AUGUST REVIEWS

GAME	RATING
10Six	★★★★★
Allegiance	★★★★½
Beetle Buggin'	★★★★★
Codename Eagle	★★★★★
Daikatana	★★★★★
Gunship!	★★★★★
Imperium Galactica 2	★★★★★
Motocross Madness	★★★★½
StarLancer	★★★★★
Tachyon	★★★★★
X-Plane	★★★★★

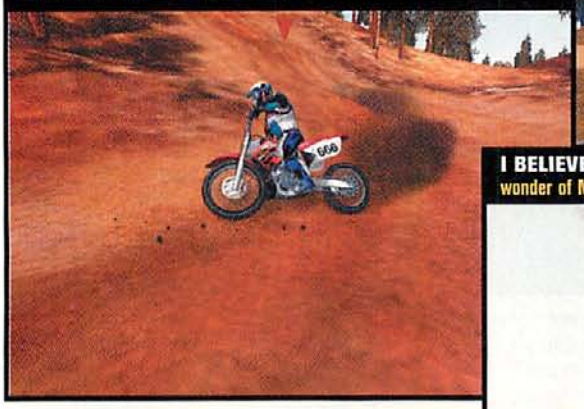
the inside/outside line adds an entirely new dimension to the game and seriously ups the replay value. The game does punish you a bit too severely for straying off the track, with a 5-second timer that resets you where you went off. Though, this makes sense for riders trying to shortcut.

Once you've passed through all of the nationals, you'll move onto the big show: Supercross. These tracks are akin to the Nationals tracks, but are set in stadiums (as a cool touch, the designers left things like goalposts and yardlines in) and involve less elevation changes. The supercross tracks are all about technique, and you'll be seriously challenged to beat the computer AI, considering how flawless it can be, even on the easiest setting. Just as in first-person-shooter deathmatching, knowing every nook and cranny of the map is your key to victory.

Overall standings are tracked throughout the pro-circuit mode, but even if you come in last in every race, it's nearly impossible to lose your way out of a career. You start off with so much money that your career is never in danger of ending. Plus, it would be nice if equipment was a little harder to come by. Every time you move up to a new level, a whole slew of new bikes and uniforms becomes available to you because your faceless sponsor provides it. The designers should have taken a page from GRAN TURISMO's excellent career mode and made your bike and equipment seem like investments.

Anything about single-player that disappoints, multiplayer mode more than makes up for. Connection options are plentiful, with IPX, TCP/IP, serial cable, and modem-to-modem options added to the standard MSN Gaming Zone option native to all Microsoft games. You can play any of the race modes – Baja, Stunt, Enduro, Nationals, or Supercross – plus a mode called Moto-tag that's kind of like anarchic polo on bikes.

DIGGING IN THE DIRT Traction varies depending on what kind of surface you're on – mud, ice, or sand.



HEAR THE TRAIN A COMIN' The Enduro tracks are filled with animated objects like trains, mining equipment, and helicopters. They look purty, and can make your life hell.



FIRST AND FORTY Small touches – like the inclusion of football field markings – really bring all of the tracks to life, including this supercross circuit.



I BELIEVE I CAN FLY A bird's-eye view lets you enjoy the graphical wonder of MCM2's lush track environments.



FLYING THROUGH A WINTER WONDERLAND MCM2's environments vary widely, from Mayan temples to alpine ski lodges.



Have Fun, Dude

Despite some minor flaws and a career mode that could use a makeover, MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2 is just about the most fun you'll ever have with a computer game. Whether you're memorizing the Supercross tracks and finding the best possible lines, or just exploring the vast Baja and Enduro worlds and all of the little secrets they hold, you'll get a lot of replay value out of this game. Expect to see MCM2 on more than one list of nominees for Racing Game of the Year. CGW

Not Your Average Level Designer

If you're going to hire a track designer, you might as well get someone who knows what they're talking about. How about the Easter Regional 125cc champion? 21-year old, French-born Stephane Roncada is a rising star in the motocross world, as well as MCM2's chief level designer and technical consultant. He got his start designing tracks for MCM1 and posting them on his Web site, **www.ronronmx.com**. That caught the attention of game designer Robb Rinard, who met Stephan at E3 in 1999 and brought him on board at Rainbow to do tracks for MCM2 (he did all of the supercross tracks), as well as motion capturing and technical advice. Name another athlete appearing on the front of a game box who's done that.

A SOLDIER ISN'T BORN. HE'S MADE



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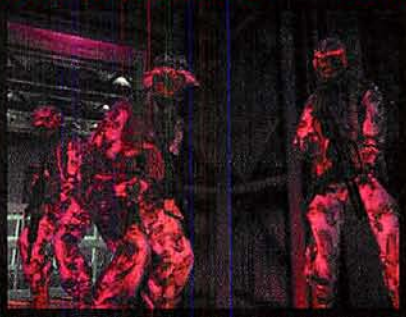
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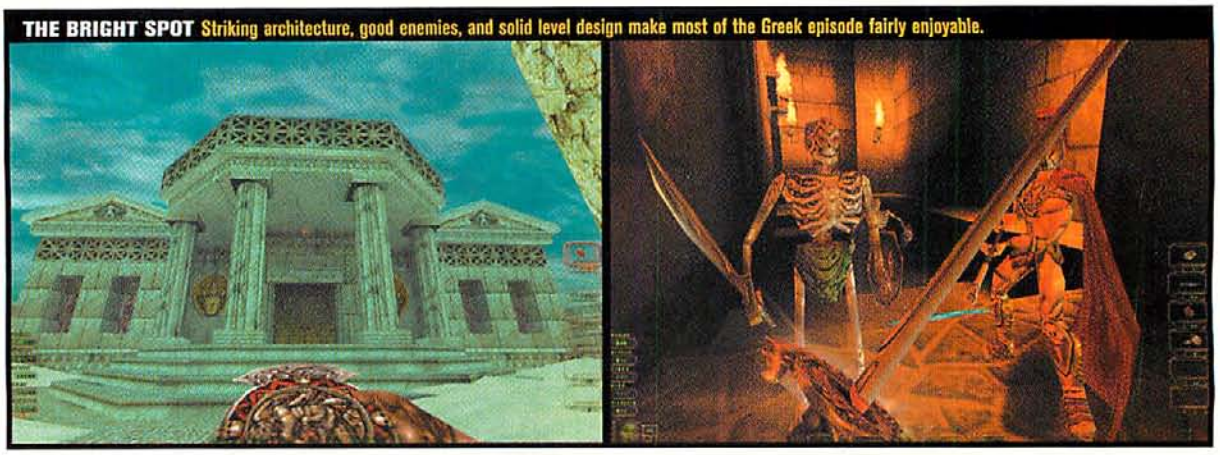


RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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THE BRIGHT SPOT Striking architecture, good enemies, and solid level design make most of the Greek episode fairly enjoyable.

I played DAIKATANA and my brain still hurts

Yep...it Stinks

DAIKATANA
reviewed by Robert Coffey

Careening wildly through the vast middle ground between agony and brain-pulping frustration, DAIKATANA is a case study in how to botch a game. Meaningless weapons, bad monsters, excruciating cutscenes, painfully broken AI...man alive, has there ever been a game where virtually every crucial design decision was as wrong as the choices in this game? Even more frustrating, there are some brief, fleeting moments when DAIKATANA actually flirts with fun; but playing this game for those few, precious moments is akin to eating your way through a dumptruck full of dead mice for the $20 bill buried at the bottom.

It Starts Bad and Gets Worse

DAIKATANA has a story buried in it somewhere, something about a magical time-travelling sword, and some evil guy using it for nefarious ends, and some other stuff, but odds are you won't follow it. Not that the game fails to devote time to the story, no, the game devotes *too much* time to the plot, spelling it out in the most tedious cutscenes imaginable. Unbearably long and wordy, the cutscenes are the epitome of the "3D Model Standing Around Bobbing Its Head at Another 3D Model Bobbing Its Head" school of storytelling. An irritating series of swooping camera pans futilely tries to inject life into these stillborn dramas.

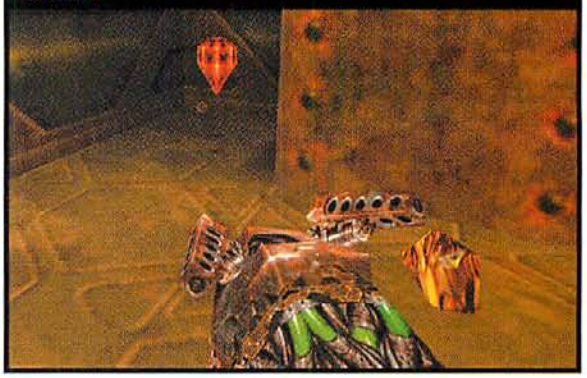
Immediately after the opening movie comes the definitive DAIKATANA moment, a moment you'll relive hundreds of times throughout the game: You mutter, "What were they thinking?" The game is carved up into four episodes taking place in four time periods, and the execrable first episode – set in 2455 Japan – brazenly throws down a gauntlet daring you not to uninstall the game. Drenched from the first second in a godawful puke green, DAIKATANA wastes no time besetting you with the worst first-level enemies ever, a robotic frog and his buddy robo-mosquito. Almost impossible to see as you tromp through the stereotypical sewers, the poisonous Froginators are as fun as a cold sore and the hideous buzzing of the mosquitoes stays with you even after they've left the game. That persistent buzzing is the sound your brain makes as it desperately tries to slither out the back of your skull.

In fact, the first-level monsters that appear in every time-travellin' episode, be it Ancient Greece or futuristic San Francisco, underscore the paucity of vision that lies at the core of the game. Poisonous spiders, poisonous robo-frogs, poisonous rats, and non-poisonous rats – does it get any more uninspired than that? Most of the other monsters are equally annoying/lame: rock-throwing prison inmates, a griffon that moves like a floating cow, poison-spitting worms, and a sewage-tossing robot that gibs with the earth-shattering sound of a frying pan beating a skillet to death.

Life Out of Balance

There are six weapons for every episode, along with the eponymous Daikatana. Almost all of these 25 weapons suck.

It's not that they're so bad *per se*; some are pretty cool (like the



JEWELS OF THE BILE Here's a save gem, one of the chief culprits in creating the black fist of hate that will grip your heart while you play DAIKATANA.

CGW RATED

PROS
At times, it actually tiptoes to the very edge of something fun.

CONS
But most of the time it just hurts to play it.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space, 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Open GL **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-32 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Eidos Interactive • Developer: Ion Storm • $45 • www.eidos.com
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated violence, blood, and gore.

staff you get in the medieval episode that summons an enemy-smashing demon), but they are by and large useless. You can get through most every level by leaning on your Daikatana and the episode's default weapon. Nothing screams fun like a moot arsenal. Worse, the final episode features the same pistol, shotgun, chaingun, death-ray combo that's been done a zillion times before. The best weapon is the Daikatana – it racks up experience with every kill it makes and grows more devastating throughout the game; unfortunately, by the end of the game, it's way too powerful and much of the game's challenge is lost.

Such game imbalance permeates DAIKATANA. The monsters in the first episode are way too powerful and the levels way too cramped to give you much chance of survival. If you do survive, the ability to apply earned experience to enhance character skills like Attack, Power, and Speed – while initially cool – steadily tips the scales decidedly in your favor. By the last episode, nothing can touch you. Whee.

In fact, one of the largest challenges in the game is dealing with the unmitigated snow shovel full of crap that is DAIKATANA's save-game system. The game autosaves with every level change, but mid-level saves are dependent upon your finding "save gems" and burning one up with every save. You can only carry up to three; the early tough levels have very few; they're sometimes hidden in secret areas; and they're placed badly in terms of combat sequences. With a number of potentially-lethal jumping sequences and some scripted events that you can only discover through frustrating trial and error, the inability to save anywhere is damnably inexcusable. It's as if John Romero forgot all about QUAKE II, QUAKE, DOOM, and virtually every other shooter in the frickin' universe.



LIFESAVER OR LIGHT SABER? The fully powered-up Daikatana is a great weapon, but it's so powerful it reduces enemies to little more than teeny speedbumps between you and the end of the level.



SHOOTING YOUR OWN FOOT The combination of your excessive weapon effects and another too-powerful monster's explosive weaponry results in visuals like this. Perfect for losing your target and dying fast.



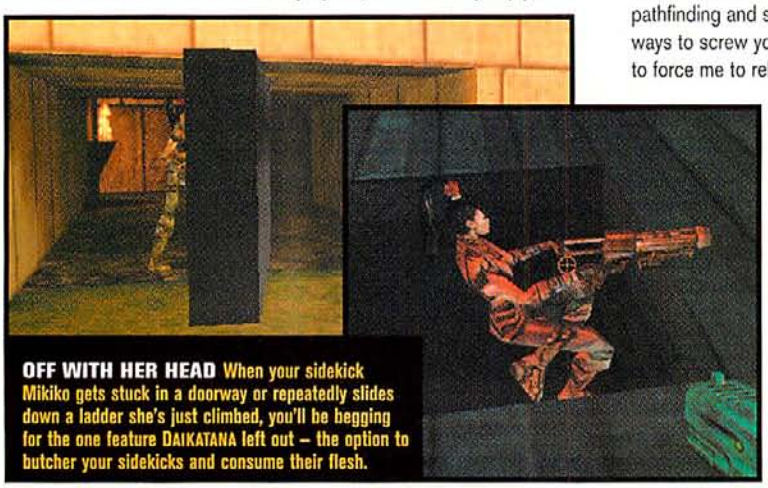
PETTING ZOO Nothing spells excitement like broken AI opponents that let you walk right up, touch them, hug them, then kill them.

It's Greek to Me

For a brief shining moment, DAIKATANA is fun, but that fun is limited only to the Grecian second episode, and only if you overlook the "Find the Five Keystones" garbage that ties the episode together. The levels are beautiful and the most interesting weapons are here, as are the best monsters (like the vicious flying harpies). I actually enjoyed most of Greece. But then I started dealing more with the AI-driven sidekicks and I wanted to personally punch every DAIKATANA team member in the mouth.

DAIKATANA's two battling sidekicks (Superfly Johnson and Mikiko Ebihara) are supposed to be one of the game's biggest selling points. In reality, these brothers in arms are the final two bullets through DAIKATANA's brain. A rudimentary command HUD lets you give basic orders to them – when the HUD actually works. At times, the HUD stops operating and you're forced to use hotkeys. I can live with that; I can't live with these idiots jumping into my line of fire every time I'm attacked, or shooting me in the back those times they can't cut me off. Worse, their horrible pathfinding and sorely deficient AI is forever finding new and exciting ways to screw you: Mikiko single-handedly found five different ways to force me to reload the game at one point late in the last episode. She was so good at ruining everything, she found she could even thwart me in God mode by tumbling out of a tram. Managing the idiot sidekicks reduces DAIKATANA to a babysitting sim, and a bad one at that.

I could go on about other sidekick deficiencies, corrupt monster AI that keeps them from attacking, lousy multiplayer, or how the game repeatedly crashed when I had to backtrack to a previous level, but you've probably got the idea by now. In spite of the briefest glimmers of promise, DAIKATANA isn't worth your time, your money, or the painfully bloody scalp you'll inevitably get from pulling great fistfuls of hair from your head. CGW



OFF WITH HER HEAD When your sidekick Mikiko gets stuck in a doorway or repeatedly slides down a ladder she's just climbed, you'll be begging for the one feature DAIKATANA left out – the option to butcher your sidekicks and consume their flesh.

Long-awaited space opera is everything you'd expect, but not much more

StarLost

STARLANCER presents a conundrum. Reviews rely upon adjectives, and none of the adjectives that come to mind for STARLANCER are negative. Slick, gorgeous, stable, challenging: Certainly these are good traits, and they are joined with strong solo missions and a well-conceived multiplayer mode. Searching in vain for some solid negatives to explain STARLANCER's inability to really grab me led only to the damn-with-faint-praise words: capable, familiar, empty, tired, clichéd. It's a fine game, but it should have been more, considering its pedigree. An interest-killing combination of ennui and déjà vu snakes through the whole endeavor.

STARLANCER
reviewed by
Thomas L. McDonald

STARLANCER is the debut space-combat sim from Digital Anvil, the company created by Chris "Wing Commander" Roberts when he left Origin (sadly, he didn't create it soon enough to spare us the Wing Commander movie. You owe me three bucks and 90 minutes in a dark room, Roberts). The game was partly – if not largely – outsourced to UK development house Warthog and Roberts' brother Erin, while the main Digital Anvil team focused on the far-more-interesting and ambitious FREELANCER. This waters down the distinguished pedigree quite a bit, making this more son-of-an-uncle's-second-cousin to WING COMMANDER, instead of the birth of a new crown prince among space-combat sims. The same development combination also gave us the flaccid PRIVATEER 2: THE DARKENING, and those of you who spent any amount of time with that game could pretty much write the rest of this review yourself.

MONGO PAWN IN GAME OF LIFE Dossiers and in-game chatter provide the best glimpses of your wingmen, but their characters never really get as fleshed out as they did in Roberts' previous games.



Reinventing Oneself

One of the prime challenges faced by Roberts and crew was to create an entirely new gameworld populated by memorable characters and epic conflicts. They didn't really succeed. The inane plot is pure pulp nonsense, though it does work fine in context. The idea of a resurgent Russia going head-to-head with Allied forces in a far-future Cold (turning to Hot) War is comically played out with plenty of evil communist posturing, martial music, and laughable accents. I didn't hear anyone say "Must get Moose and Squirrel," but it wouldn't have surprised me a bit. Still, it creates a cartoonish Tom Clancy/James Bond milieu that does the job. Plenty of heroes and villains emerge, but they lack the immediacy of the WING COMMANDER characterizations. Leaving the player-characterization loose – supposedly to create a more palpable experience – has a distancing effect instead, so you never really get to know anyone very well.

SPACE JUNK The debris field left by a successful kill almost always smacks against your ship, sometimes complete with the corpse of a vanquished foe!



A great deal of the twisting narrative is told in-mission, which is both a strength and a problem. There are only about two dozen missions total, but these are long missions with multiple goals and plot turns, so gameplay never feels thin. Single missions take on epic scope as mini-stories and conflicts emerge, pushing you first in one direction and then in another. This extreme length and narrative richness make mission design the strongest point of the game. The most potent and effective plot and character elements happen right in the engine, creating a seamless cinematic texture.

Unfortunately, there are no in-mission save points *à la* INDEPENDENCE WAR DELUXE, leaving you with very long replays if you fumble in

CGW RATED

PROS
Slick production values; deep, satisfying mission structure; campaigns can be fought co-op in multiplayer.

CONS
Very familiar trappings and gameplay; simplistic flight model; lackluster ship design.

Requirements: Pentium-II 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space, DirectX 7.0-compatible sound card, Windows-compatible mouse.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** MS Gaming Zone

Publisher: Microsoft • Developer: Digital Anvil/Warthog • $40 • www.microsoft.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone



BUBBLE BOBBLE Despite some blurring effects and other tricks, STARLANCER gives you that old WING COMMANDER feeling of sitting still while the universe spins about you.

the final yards. Complex missions such as these demand at least a console-style save point. While there are no stand-alone missions and only a rudimentary quick combat mode, multiplayer is quite good. In a rare, welcome, and hugely-demanded feature, you can now play through the entire game cooperatively online via the Zone. Standard dog-fighting modes are also available, including traditional deathmatch.

Easy on the Eyes

The new 3D engine performs admirably in most particulars. Models are detailed and smooth, with refined textures and moving parts. Frame-rates are respectable. Explosions are damn near ideal, right down to little debris fields left by disintegrated ships. Battles are fast and arcade-like, but they still lack that true feeling of forward motion. Some blur effects and other tricks help convey the feeling of speed, but we've seen better. This leaves you with a bit of the old "rotating bubble," where it looks as though your ship is standing still and the universe is turning around *you*.

Scale also seems off. Compared to your ship, some supposedly large vessels just seem too small, like midget subs. There are some fair-sized cap ships, but nothing approaching the awesome scope of



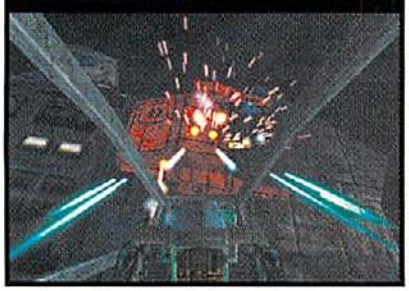
KILL A COMMIE FOR MOMMIE The best part of STARLANCER is being able to kill commies again. There may be a lot of bombing runs and cap ships to kill, but the bulk of the game is still pure dogfighting action.

I-WAR or FREESPACE 2. Overall, the ship design is decent but uninspired. None of these will be remembered like a Kilrathi fighter or X-Wing, and performance differences among the various designs are academic at best. I tried different ships for different missions and never got the feeling that one was more or less effective for a particular task. The performance curve among the models is flat, so diversity rests on weapons loadout. Fortunately, there are some nicely-modeled ballistic weapons and a healthy array of torpedoes with useful tactical distinctions.

The cockpit is completely serviceable but sticks fairly close to formula. A unique radar display looks somewhat like a simplified three-dimensional version of a modern jet fighter HUD, and works well once you get used to it. All the information you need is kept on-screen with fairly discreet transparent displays. The only real gap is in the control options, which lack the breadth needed to effectively track friendlies, enemies, ship functions, and objectives with a simple set of programmable hot keys. Many functions have key equivalents, but sim fans are used a wider array of instant targeting options ("target third guy from the left with red hair!") to help stay alert in the thick of combat.

AI is nothing to write home about, but neither is it a complete disaster. Enemy ships are predictable and not quite aggressive enough. They sometimes work together, but more commonly will simply turn and turn until dead. Wingmen are a bit diffident and usually choose to ignore frenzied pleas to get the bogie off your tail. Firepower and lots of it is offered up instead, in the form of cap ships bristling with weapons and wave upon wave of fighters. This is one of the problems with the long missions: They become a test in missile hoarding. After a couple of missions, you learn to expect another wave and another objective, so you begin doggedly saving up missiles for the next big salvo. Some sensible use of in-flight reloading – as other games have used – would have been more logical.

Given the current dearth of space sims out there, I know I should be more enthusiastic about a major title which does pretty much everything expected of it. STARLANCER is a decent, accomplished game. It even merits a box quote like, "A WING COMMANDER for 2000!" It is indeed that in many aspects, and yet that's all it is. After FREESPACE 2 and INDEPENDENCE WAR, that's not quite enough. CGW



STAY ON TARGET As gamers have come to demand, you can target the subsystems of capital ships, taking first their shield, then their weapons, then their cursed lives!



LOWERCASE SHIPS Capital ships rarely achieve the bulk and scope found in FREESPACE 2 or I-WAR, which robs some missions of their potential epic scope and grandeur.

Novalogic's first space foray makes a decent debut

Aspiring, but not Inspired

TACHYON: THE FRINGE

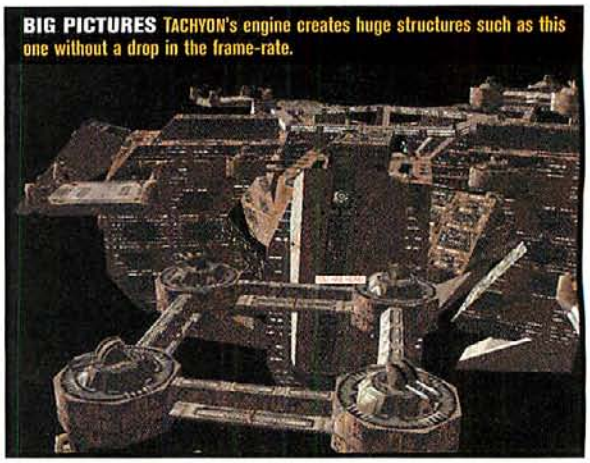
reviewed by Gordon Berg

How many times have you read a review that said, "If you're a fan of <insert game category here>, you'll probably enjoy <insert game title here>"? While this summation is used often enough to seem almost a lame crutch, it does serve a purpose. It addresses an essential question ("Will I like this game?") for both types of readers out there: those who are already devoted to a given genre, and those who don't usually care for the type of game in question but might still be interested in a good crossover title. That said, I can say with utmost confidence – and you knew this was coming – that if you're a fan of space-combat sims, you'll probably enjoy TACHYON: THE FRINGE.

Taking on the final frontier is new territory for Novalogic, a company better known for its current-day, Earth-based, combat simulations. The lack of space sim experience shows in TACHYON's definition and design: Novalogic opted to borrow singular elements from previous major space sims rather than to break any significant new ground...er, space. This is most apparent in the derivative choice of mission accomplishment throughout the majority of the single-player game, where the player is usually asked to fly to location A, pick up object at location B, fend off multiple opponents at location C, etc. Nonetheless, TACHYON has a certain style to it that grows on you after a while...but a while it takes. You'll need to persevere through the first several missions before any real interest grows.

Setting the Stage

Playing the role of Jake Logan (voiced by Bruce Campbell of *Evil Dead* fame), you're a mercenary fighter pilot who eventually gets the shaft. What the box calls a "multi-sided in-game storyline" that allows you to "make crucial decisions that will change your future" is actually nothing more than a single-branched campaign where you make only one real decision: For which side will you fight? You'll have freedom of movement throughout the galaxy, but it's somewhat misleading. You can travel around all you want to different sectors, but the gameplay won't necessarily let you do anything once you get there. Some independent missions appear equally in either campaign, but it's the unfolding story told from opposing perspectives that comprise the game's biggest single-player charm. No, it's not INDEPENDENCE WAR, but what is? And Bruce Campbell's voice acting is also a bit flat at times, but hey, it's still Bruce Campbell. Hail to the king, baby.



BIG PICTURES TACHYON's engine creates huge structures such as this one without a drop in the frame-rate.

For those who thumb their noses at games requiring joysticks, TACHYON offers a decent mousing alternative. In fact, it should be your preferred means of controlling your ship. Given how the fighters can move forward and backward via thrusters (inertia is loosely modeled), and how ships can use a powerful slide feature, the mouse is definitely mightier. Graphically, TACHYON is somewhat dull when compared to the splendor of an epic battle in FREESPACE 2 or even STARLANCER, but you won't see space stations any bigger than those found in TACHYON – they're huge. And it can make for some interesting combat, darting in and around the exterior of these beasts.

It's Lonely Out Here

Yet for all of Novalogic's efforts to finally bring some real atmosphere to the single-player experience by creating a more believable gameworld, it's once again the multiplayer aspect that makes their title worth recommending. Having developed highly-addictive multiplayer qualities in their DELTA FORCE series, Novalogic has been equally successful with TACHYON on their NovaWorld servers, especially so with the Base Wars. This option implements just enough strategic elements to make the use of tactics worthwhile: mine resources, gain experience levels, and progress up the tech levels to get better equipment. Fly carelessly, and you'll lose that experience. Ignore your defenses and you could cost your team the better weapons they fought so hard to earn. Best of all, multiplayer gameplay over a 56K modem connection is practically devoid of lag. Bottom line: Think of TACHYON as a poor man's ALLEGIANCE, but with free multiplayer. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Decent number of off-line missions; outstanding multiplayer via Base Wars; Bruce Campbell!

CONS

A weak single-player experience when compared to other space sims; We've seen better graphics and AI.



LIVE TARGET Mixing it up with humans is much harder (and more satisfying) than tangling with the AI.

Requirements: Pentium 200MMX w/8MB RAM 3D video card, or Pentium 400 MMX without 3D card; 32MB RAM (64MB if AGP card present); 500MB hard drive space, 4X CD-ROM. **Recommended Requirements:** 3D-accelerator w/16MB video memory, 64MB RAM, 1.2GB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D

Multiplayer Support: Internet (120 players via NovaWorld), 16 players via LAN.

Publisher: Novalogic • Developer: Novalogic • $40 • www.novalogic.com/games/tachyon • ESRB Rating: Everyone

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YOU FLY, I'LL SHOOT STUFF The copilot/gunner's seat in the Apache.

BAD TO THE BONE A German Tiger looks for trouble.

GUNSHIP! wins the looks award, but falls short on gameplay

Banal Beauty

GUNSHIP! is reminiscent of the beauty queen who says she wants to be a veterinarian because she's always wanted to work with children; a real looker, but not a lot of there there.

GUNSHIP!
reviewed by Jeff Lackey

GUNSHIP! is so pretty that I keep booting it up, hoping that I uncover its elusive depth, but it doesn't take long before disappointment sets in, and, with a deep sigh, I shut her down. So let's make it clear from the start: Despite its striking visuals, if you're looking to GUNSHIP! for a serious simulation of flying and fighting in a combat helicopter, look elsewhere.

CGW RATED

PROS
The terrain is very pretty, with the best trees in any chopper sim.

CONS
Buggy command system; the "realistic" flight model is anything but; every mission starts in the air; canned, linear campaigns.

A Fine Pedigree

GUNSHIP!'s ancestors – the original GUNSHIP and its sequel, GUNSHIP II – set the standard for quality in helicopter sims. It was only years later that the LONGBOW series challenged the GUNSHIP family for bragging rights as "best chopper simulation." So it's understandable that most combat helicopter aficionados held huge expectations for Microprose's new sim. But when hard times fell upon serious flight sims, many chopper-jockeys worried that Microprose would dumb-down the sim, tailoring it for the arcade crowd. Word leaked out that GUNSHIP! would indeed have an "easy" mode, but the serious aspects would remain in the game as an option for the hardcore chopper pilots.

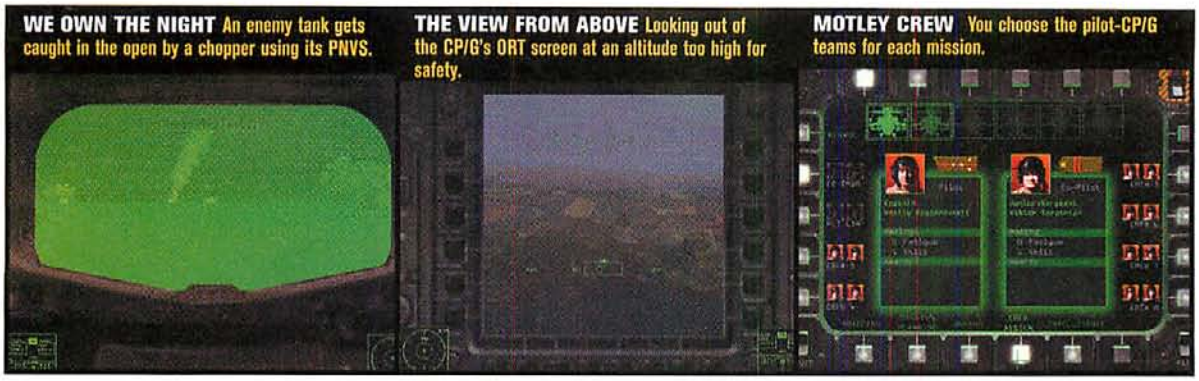
Setting the simulation on full-realism results in a flight model that feels like the "easy" flight model in more serious sims. With damage set on full-realism, it's possible to bounce off trees with only a change in direction as the result of your error; the ground also seems to be made of chopper-friendly Flubber. All missions start in the air, so you can safely ignore the section in the manual on take-off procedures. If you're used to reversing your throttle to simulate a realistic collective, you'll have to change your habits – as there's no option for that here. Weapons can seem incredibly powerful, with a single cannon shell capable of destroying a building or a tank.

Okay, it's not a realistic sim – which is fine, if GUNSHIP! succeeds as a game. It certainly looks promising when you first load it. You're tossed into a European conflagration in which the Russians have regained their might and decided to raise some hell, resulting in a war involving the U.S., British, German, and Russian militaries. You can fly and fight the campaign in any of the four combatants' attack choppers, providing some additional replay value. The campaign is of the linear stripe, where you can only proceed to the next mission once you've successfully completed the current one.

Up, Up, and Away...

You choose a side, start up a campaign, and get your tasking for your first mission. The briefing is fairly well done, with a standard map and information on the objectives, enemy and friendly forces, weather, and so on. You can choose a weapons load-out for your aircraft, as

Requirements: Pentium 266MHz, 32 MB RAM. **3D Support:** Direct 3D **Multiplayer Support:** Co-op or head-to-head via Internet (TCP/IP), LAN, modem, or serial.
Publisher: Hasbro Interactive • **Developer:** Microprose • **$50** • **www.gunship.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen



WE OWN THE NIGHT An enemy tank gets caught in the open by a chopper using its PNVS.

THE VIEW FROM ABOVE Looking out of the CP/G's ORT screen at an altitude too high for safety.

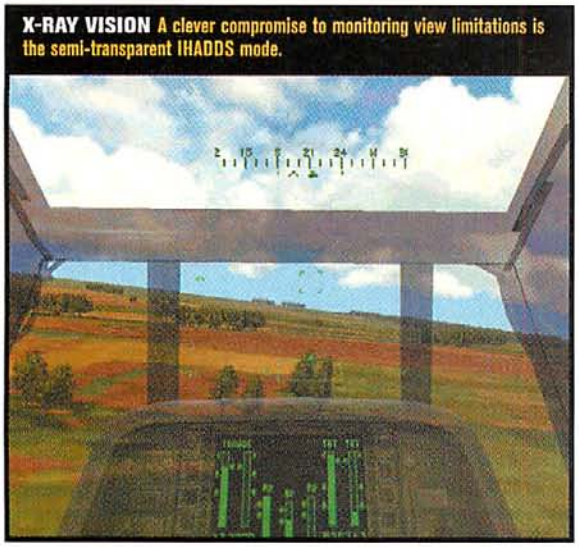
MOTLEY CREW You choose the pilot-CP/G teams for each mission.

well as select from various crewmembers to man the choppers. A default mission plan is presented on the map, which most novices will likely accept as is – although you can change waypoints and actions if so desired.

Hit the fly button, and you're simultaneously presented with the beauty and the beast that is GUNSHIP!. Terrain is simply gorgeous, with trees that can actually be used for cover. However, your first view of these trees will likely be the sight of them spinning in circles around your helicopter, as GUNSHIP! starts you out in the air and your chopper is often in the middle of a spinning dive when you appear in the cockpit. Quickly regain control of your bird, fly to your first waypoint, and the next unpleasant surprise strikes. In most flight sims, your aircraft and those of the rest of your wingmen will automatically proceed to the next waypoint; but here, you must order everyone to continue with the mission as planned. That wouldn't be so bad if GUNSHIP! used a simple command such as "+" or "w" to advance waypoints. No such luck – a menu system is used in which you have to press a series of keys to simply advance to the next waypoint. Adding insult to injury, when you do complete your orders to advance to the next one, you'll notice that the current waypoint on your HUD is still labeled as "#1." Huh? In an inexplicable move, the designers have decided that EVERY waypoint will be labeled as waypoint "1." Why bother with a spot on the HUD for the waypoint number if they all have the same identity? It's confusing, and completely pointless.



CHOOSING SIDES You can fly for the U.S., German, British, or Russian armies.



X-RAY VISION A clever compromise to monitoring view limitations is the semi-transparent IHADDS mode.

Flyin' Shotgun

A promising feature is the ability to ride in the CP/G seat, allowing the computer to pilot the chopper while you find and liquidate targets. The problem here lies in the computer pilot and some broken-keyboard commands. In concept, you tell your pilot to fly to the next waypoint while you scan for targets. In practice, he'll start flying toward the current waypoint, and then you'll notice that he's wandering off-course. Order him back on-course: Maybe he'll obey, maybe not. Then you find a target and want to maneuver into position. Hit the key to tell the pilot to turn left – he replies "turning left!" and turns left. Oops, too much, okay, hit the key for turning right. Your brain surgeon/pilot replies "turning left!" and turns left. Hit the turn-right key again and get the same undesirable results. There are a few other maddening broken-key commands. Equally as frustrating is when you tell your pilot to go into a hover, then check the map to examine the surrounding terrain. The pilot immediately unmasks and takes off for a waypoint, leaving you in a rush to jump out of the map screen and scream at your pilot to get his butt back in cover.

Other problems that make this game difficult for the novices at whom it is clearly targeted are the avionics and weapons systems. The avionics are quite simplified, but in keeping things simple, Microprose has eliminated any kind of Threat Early Warning System, so there's no warning when some bad guy has locked onto your gunship, no warning when a missile has been launched. Quite often, your helicopter will get knocked out of the air with absolutely no warning and no chance to take evasive action. Another flaw – despite the seeming newbie focus – is the use of weapons. Unless you carefully read the manual, the quick reference guide, and the in-game tutorials in order to piece together the necessary information, you may well be baffled as to why your missile refuses to lock onto that tank in your sights.

Return to Base

It's a shame that GUNSHIP! is plagued with broken commands and bad design choices, because underneath it all beats the heart of a potentially-fun arcade chopper sim. The battlefield action is fast and furious, with a war going on around you as artillery support is called in, ground units clash, armor pops smoke to hide, and so on. And the terrain is really beautiful. But unless the game is patched to fix some of its more grievous issues, it's impossible to recommend GUNSHIP! to anyone. CGW



SPACE TORPEDOES AHOY! Up close or at a distance, the space battles in IMPERIUM GALACTICA II always look amazing.

Great fun alone, IMPERIUM GALACTICA II's multiplayer is lost in space

Talented Soloist

IMPERIUM GALACTICA II

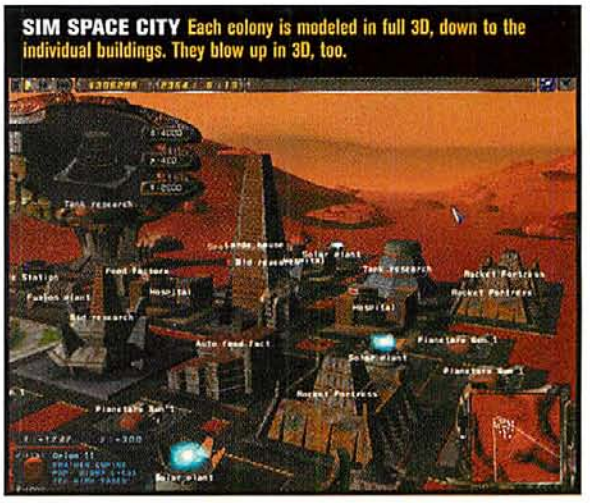
reviewed by Jason Kapalka

Open memo to any developer doing a 4X (Explore, Exploit, Expand, Exterminate) space-conquest game: Look, I know we're talking about a more intellectual genre than head-bursting shooters, okay? But darn it, the reason we wade through several dozen economic-development menus, tech trees, and ship-design spreadsheets is so that when our fleet of Meson-Devastator-equipped battle-moons *finally* rumbles into action, we can chortle sadistically as gaudy neon laser-beams send the opposing ships to their shrieking plasmatic death. It's what makes it all worthwhile.

IMPERIUM GALACTICA II (IG2) manages to whet your appetite for wholesale cosmic destruction before it rudely sends you off for a cold shower. In its campaigns vs. the computer, it features the most spectacular space battles seen outside of HOMEWORLD, with dozens of capital ships hurling giant flamey bolts of high-tech doom while swarms of fighters swirl and swoop through the melee. All righty! But when you try a multiplayer game, or even a randomized skirmish against computer players, designers Digital Reality opt for a "simulated" resolution, which means that the payoff for assembling that mighty Meson death-armada comes in the form of a single line of text: "Your forces at Bosrenor XI defeated an enemy fleet."

Argh! Carnage interruptus! Come on. Would you have been satisfied if the climactic battle in *Star Wars* was offscreen, with Princess Leia reading a telegram saying, "Death Star destroyed... X-wing losses heavy... we win"? [Note: At press time, Digital Reality was getting ready to release a patch that should, in theory, add tactical combat to multiplayer games, making most of the above rant somewhat superfluous. But you might want to check their Web site at **www.imperiumgalactica2.com** for the current status before you make any shopping decisions.]

Now that I've got that off my chest, IMPERIUM GALACTICA II, like the original, breaks from standard space-conquering protocol in being real-time rather than turn-based. While you can speed up or slow down the gameplay – or pause it at any time – events march on regardless of whether you're designing ships, researching new technology, or bribing enemy emperors with Scooby snacks. Diehard MASTER OF ORION fans are likely to be suspect of this development – should a fast mouse-finger really be a prerequisite for managing a galactic empire? Fortunately, the controllable speed makes this model pretty workable, though there are times when it seems you're under a constant barrage of messages informing you that "A new spy has arrived!" and so on; interesting info, to be sure, but not when the Kra'hen battle fleet with their Destructor Ray is ravening at



SIM SPACE CITY Each colony is modeled in full 3D, down to the individual buildings. They blow up in 3D, too.

CGW RATED



PROS

Utterly gorgeous graphics and cool combat with tons of options in three campaigns.

CONS

Video card bugs; steep learning curve; no multiplayer tactical combat.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space, 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 300MHz, 64MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct 3D **Multiplayer Support:** Internet, LAN (2-8 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: GT Interactive • Developer: Digital Reality • $40 • www.imperiumgalactica2.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated violence.



MAP OF THE STARS The system map can be rotated, tilted, zoomed, and viewed from any angle. Not super useful, but really cool looking.



LET'S SEE NASA BUILD THIS The research screen, while oddly fixated on polygons, allows you to select from various branches of science for your next project.

your borders.

The other thing that needs to be said about IG2 is that it is, without question, the most lushly gorgeous and visually appealing space-conquest game ever made. Everything – from the nebula-wreathed starmap to the contour-mapped surface of every planet – is rendered in swanky 3D, allowing you to rotate, zoom, tilt, and pan to your heart's content. Even the menus are kinetic and flashy – just saving a game is more visually exciting than the space battles in some titles. Unfortunately, there are some wacky video card compatibility issues, and resolutions above 640x480 are, at this time, supported "unofficially." You'll need to do some .ini file tweaking or download a hack in order to change the default.

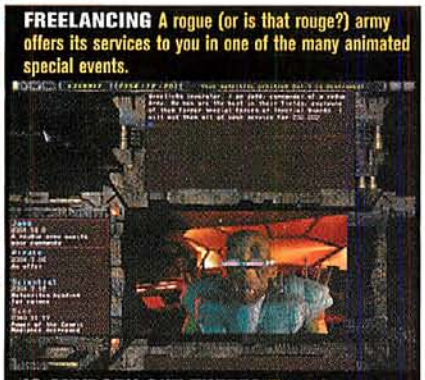
If the shiny 3D world isn't enough, you'll quickly note that the game comes on four CDs, each packed with movies. Now, I'm generally the first guy to reach for the ESC key when a clumsily-rendered alien raises its misshapen head in an intro, but these are some beautifully-made movies, just about on par with film or TV effects. Do they make a lick of difference to gameplay? No, but the first time you see the terraforming cut-scene, with a vast spacecraft rocking and buckling as it erupts with a not-very-scientific beam of planet-reshaping energy, I defy you not to release an involuntary "Oooooh" or two.

The heart of the game, thanks to the explosion-free multiplayer mode, lies in the three campaigns. You can play as the generic human-type Solarians; the Kra'hen, a race so warlike their spy, trade, and diplomacy buttons are permanently grayed out; or the Shinari, a species weak in combat but that have enhanced trading and espionage abilities.

The campaign is a single game, not a series of disconnected episodes, but in place of the typical random events found in games of this ilk (e.g. "Meteor Storm hit Argus IV!–3 production"), you get frequent animated interludes describing either one-time events or ongoing subplots. For instance, the Solarian player must deal with the growing influence of an internal splinter group, the cultish Brotherhood of Tears. My personal favorite event was the Kra'hen God-Emperor's demand for blood sacrifice on a massive scale, leading to the admittedly unique dialogue choice: "Would you like to kill 10%, 20%, or 30% of your population?"

Gameplay proceeds in standard 4X fashion: Starting with a single planet, you explore and colonize outward, while building up your military and researching new inventions. Colony management is vaguely SIMCITY-esque, as you plop various installations down on your 3D planet map. Thankfully, this can be automated fairly efficiently, as the micromanagement gets pretty bad once you have a half-dozen or more systems in your empire.

The tech tree is extensive, with branches for ships, ground forces, and colony improvements; but it's not especially imaginative, with cloaking devices and paralyzer rays being about as whimsical as it gets. Ship design is likewise a bit lackluster – in most cases the Autodesign button does a perfectly fine job – but at least upgrading old models in the field is relatively painless.



FREELANCING A rogue (or is that rouge?) army offers its services to you in one of the many animated special events.



IS ANYBODY OUT THERE? The status screen lets you keep track of who's still breathing.

While the diplomacy system is a bit convoluted (and none too useful, given the AI's tendency to shoot first and ask questions later), the espionage in IG2 is a ton of fun. Each individual spy can progress, RPG-style, through a number of levels, gaining stat increases and new abilities up to and including the power to assassinate enemy emperors. Captured spies can be converted to double agents, who will then report on the tasks given them by their nominal "owners." There's nothing quite so shocking as seeing your master spy – pampered and trained up to James Bond skill levels – unveiled as a turncoat who's been feeding your enemies secrets for years.

If the COMMAND & CONQUER-style ground combat is a bit of a misfire, bogging down as confused units try to find a path through the streets of your colony, the space battles are a gas. It's quite a hoot to see your fleet intercept an enemy invasion just before it reaches your prize colony, dispatching the foe in a blaze of flaming polygons.

IG2 is not a perfect game, but the whole somehow comes off as greater than the sum of its uneven parts. If Digital Reality carries through on their promises of a multiplayer-combat patch (and if they fix some nagging configuration and compatibility problems), the game could turn out to be a real gem. Even as it stands, the highest compliment I can pay to IG2 is simply this: I think that at long last, I may retire my MASTER OF ORION 2 CD. CGW



GOD'S-EYE VIEW People obey a good commander, and a good one keeps the team stocked and motivated. Learn the commanding ropes quickly.



LIGHT 'EM UP At its most basic level, you can play this as just another space dogfight sim.

A blend of RTS and space sim make for great galactic mayhem

I Pledge Allegiance

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

ALLEGIANCE
by Thierry Nguyen

Clones, more-of-the-same, the lack of innovation; these are all, sadly, a part of game design these days. If there is one positive thing to be said about the glut of derivative titles, it's that the well-done, innovative ones stand out even more. Case in point: Microsoft's ALLEGIANCE. Rather than crank out another WWII-dogfight-style space sim that would pale in comparison to the ultra-refined FREESPACE 2, Microsoft went and created a multi-genre hybrid game that works. In other words, the innovation alone makes this a contender for Space Sim of the Year.

Trans-genre Studies

Like the recent BATTLEZONE games, ALLEGIANCE melds real-time strategy with another genre, and succeeds. At its core, gameplay is akin to that of a space-based RTS skirmish map: A "commander" looks at the overall system map, and starts clicking around on the units in his team. He decides where to send miners to harvest resources, where to build stations in order to create more ships, and which interceptors should be dispatching the incoming enemy-bomber horde. All this in order to wipe out the other teams, and to control all the sectors in the map.

The twist is that, with the exception of miners, every unit is controlled by another flesh-and-blood gamer. Gamers not only pilot fighter-craft, they can man the turrets of bombers, gunships, or anything bigger, or spring for taking the helm of a mighty capital ship. The numerous upgrades, weapons, and factional differences (as of press time, there were three basic factions, with varying tech trees and units) help round out the sense of individuality. During the course of a game, you can do things like fly cloaked ships for sneak attacks, scout out new resource nodes, intercept enemy bombers, or fly in and ripcord (combination towing and teleporting) a bunch of bombers with you.

Like STARSIEGE: TRIBES, your enjoyment of the game is directly proportional to how well your team is coordinated. Play with halfwits who don't obey orders or who fly into each other, and you're liable to lose both the game and your faith in other gamers. Ah...but play with a team that acts like a well-disciplined strike force, *then* you have something. When you're rescuing a fellow gamer's life-pod with your Interceptor, or playing a part in a variety of scenarios including troop transport, bomber runs, or base captures – you'll see that good teamplay is good gameplay. If you really have to burn some aggression, you can hop onto a deathmatch server, but that eventually becomes boring and a waste of the game's potential.

Jamming Online With the Boys

For ten bucks a month, you can join the ALLEGIANCE Zone and get access to persistent rankings, larger matches (free ones support around 32 players, while paying ones can peak at around 100), and special maps, ships, technologies, and so forth. Otherwise, you can just play for free on public servers via the Internet Gaming Zone. At press time, there's not much incentive to spring the extra dough except for the larger matches. Hopefully, Microsoft will follow through and give players value for their money. Otherwise, the game will start to get stale.

The biggest problem, on the technical side, is the fact that ALLEGIANCE uses DirectPlay, which is *really* finicky about its Internet connection. If you have DSL or a cable modem, and use Internet-Connection-Sharing (ICS) or Network-Address-Translation (NAT) or both, the game just won't play.

If you have the proper network connection, the right kind of gamers, and if Microsoft follows up on the initial release with more improvements, ALLEGIANCE could well be the first persistent online space sim that actually works. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Some of the best online team-based gameplay out there.

CONS
Aside from some technical bugs, online halfwits are your biggest threat in this game.

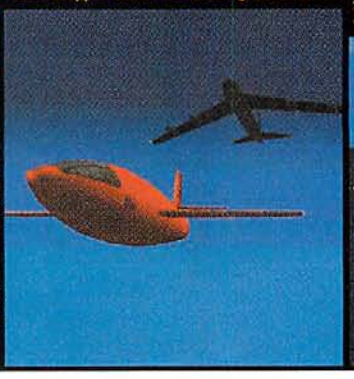
Requirements: Pentium 266MHz, 32MB RAM, 270MB hard drive space, DirectX-compatible sound and video card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM, 3D card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** Internet Gaming Zone (6-120 players), LAN.

Publisher: Microsoft • **Developer:** Microsoft Research • **$40 (plus optional $9.95/month)** • **www.microsoft.com/games/allegiance**
ESRB Rating: Everyone; animated violence.


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Screenshot of Slave Zero courtesy of Accolade.
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BIG BIRD A Boeing 777 on final approach. This one handles as you'd expect: like a freight train with wings.



READY TO RUMBLE An X-15 has just been dropped and is about to light the torch.



PARTY CRASHER In the real world, this would put you on the wrong side of an anti-aircraft missile, but in X-PLANE, the only thing you'll need is an arrestor hook.

Not so much a game as a sim contruction kit

The X Factor

X-PLANE

reviewed by Jesse "I flew the F-16 and you didn't" Hiatt

If you really got into designing your own paper airplanes as a kid, then this one's for you. X-PLANE is a home-brew flight sim, an individual programmer's labor of love. It is a flight sim, plane builder, airfoil tester, terrain editor, and physics experiment all in one.

It is a very impressive feat to accomplish such an ambitious project single-handedly, but as can be expected without a huge staff and QA budget, the sim remains a little buggy and rough around the edges. Once you get past the unpolished interface and the unconventional layout, however, there is actually quite a lot of substance here. The graphics are not spectacular once you've been spoiled by FLIGHT UNLIMITED 3, but you do get the entire world to play around in with over 6,000 airports to start. Plus, if you don't like a cockpit graphic, paint job, terrain region, or anything else about the game, you are encouraged to fire up one of the editors and make your virtual world a better place.

Surprisingly enough, as a practice aid for real flying, X-PLANE actually surpasses FU3 and MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIM 2000 in some regards. This is due in part to the very realistic behavior of the cockpit instruments and gauges during most normal flight conditions, and the comprehensive communication and navigation features. Also, the often-overlooked trim effects and controls are far superior to the competition's, and these small details become very critical if you are trying to fly realistically.

Another truly unique feature about X-PLANE's virtual world is that you can leave that world. Using the X-30 Aerospace Plane, you take off from a runway, rocket up into the stratosphere, and then – with some careful maneuvering – you can re-enter the earth's atmosphere. Other notable rocket rides include the X-3 Stiletto, X-1, and X-15, all of which launch under the wing of a B-52. And now, in version 5.23 (a free upgrade), you can fly through accurately-modeled Martian landscape and atmosphere.

The physics model is unique in that it actually simulates the behavior of the airfoils on the aircraft, based on their shape. This allows for new planes to be designed, loaded in, and flight-tested by the user. This novel physics model also creates a unique feel for the game that's refreshingly realistic most of the time. On the other hand – while solid in most normal conditions – the model is lacking some nuance, can be a little squirrelly, and sometimes breaks down in anything but normal flight. It is obvious that X-PLANE honed in on the factors that would actually be important for a real pilot doing some practice at home, and concentrated on these.

X-PLANE does not have the look or feel of a product coming from a large staff working on a well-funded project, and isn't entirely appropriate for improvised aerobatics or barnstorming. It is, however, the only sim out there right now that is entirely customizable, and is probably the closest thing you'll find that compares to an actual FAA-approved training sim (with a price tag to match). CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Highly tweakable environment; great flexibility for attaching external gear.

CONS

Not really a game; more of a simulator and plane-building environment.



I CAN SEE MY HOUSE FROM HERE Version 5.23 lets you pilot the Space Shuttle back home.

Requirements: Pentium-II 300MHz, 80MB hard drive space, 96MB RAM, DirectX 5.0, joystick. **Recommended Requirements:** 3D card that supports OpenGL
3D Support: OpenGL **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Laminar Research • $99 • www.x-plane.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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QUICK HITS

CODENAME EAGLE



Imagine playing a computer game where history has been rewritten.

Imagine an alternate Roaring '20s where the evil Russian Empire rules the world and you have to stop this oppression by sabotaging installations, shooting down Russian biplanes, and blowing missiles. It all sounds like fun, right?

Now, imagine doing all of this with weapons that have shoddy aiming and range characteristics; basic controls that are begging for more depth; no running, crouching, or stealth movements; and missions that are nearly impossible to complete. Add an AI that tends to cripple itself with enemies that you can easily kill – or better yet, push all over the map. And, finally, imagine mediocre environments that look, feel, and sound like mud, slapped into a series of adventures that lack tension. Does this still sound like fun? Trust me, it's not.

To be fair, CODENAME EAGLE does offer some interesting gameplay. There's a really cool scoring system that monitors your progress from mission to mission, and missions do have multiple objectives with added twists like blowing a dam, or assassinating the Tsar.

★½☆☆☆ CODENAME EAGLE also allows you to drive vehicles and use their mounted weapons. You can even fly biplanes to engage the enemy in dogfights.

But is it enough to rescue the game from the hall of shame? Simply stated, no. Though CODENAME EAGLE does have some pluses, its basic interface, crappy AI, and mediocre environment hamstrings what could have been a worthwhile tactical sim.

–Raphael Liberatore

Genre: Action • **Publisher:** TalonSoft • **Developer:** Refraction Games
$40 • www.talonsoft.com • **ESRB Rating:** Mature; animated blood & gore, animated violence.



10SIX

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** SegaSoft • Free for 7 days; $10 a month. • www.10six.com • **ESRB Rating:** None

10SIX sets out to do what no one has done before: create a 1,000,000-player online game world. Build a base, build some tanks, arm them, defend your chunk of land. Everyone's got their own piece of the million-slice pie, and everyone's fighting to control more territory. And it's not nearly as good as it could have been.

First of all, each chunk of land is a distinct, independent map; so you don't move from one map to another, you teleport to other areas. As a result, you're moving

★½☆☆☆ blindly into enemy territory, which is bad news for newbies who will most likely be smooshed to paste with their first foray into combat.

Fine, dying's no big deal. Unfortunately, most players are vengeful and attack your base as retribution – and if you lose your base, yer screwed. You have to start over in a new section of land with 1/3 the resources you had before, making it even harder to defend your base.

Your units' AI is brain-dead; there are some interface bugs; it's impossible to shoot anything accurately even with a good ping; and everyone else seems to have massively-powerful weapons. This one's got a long, *long* way to go before it has a chance at its 10^6 player goal. *–Alex Handy*

BEETLE BUGGIN'

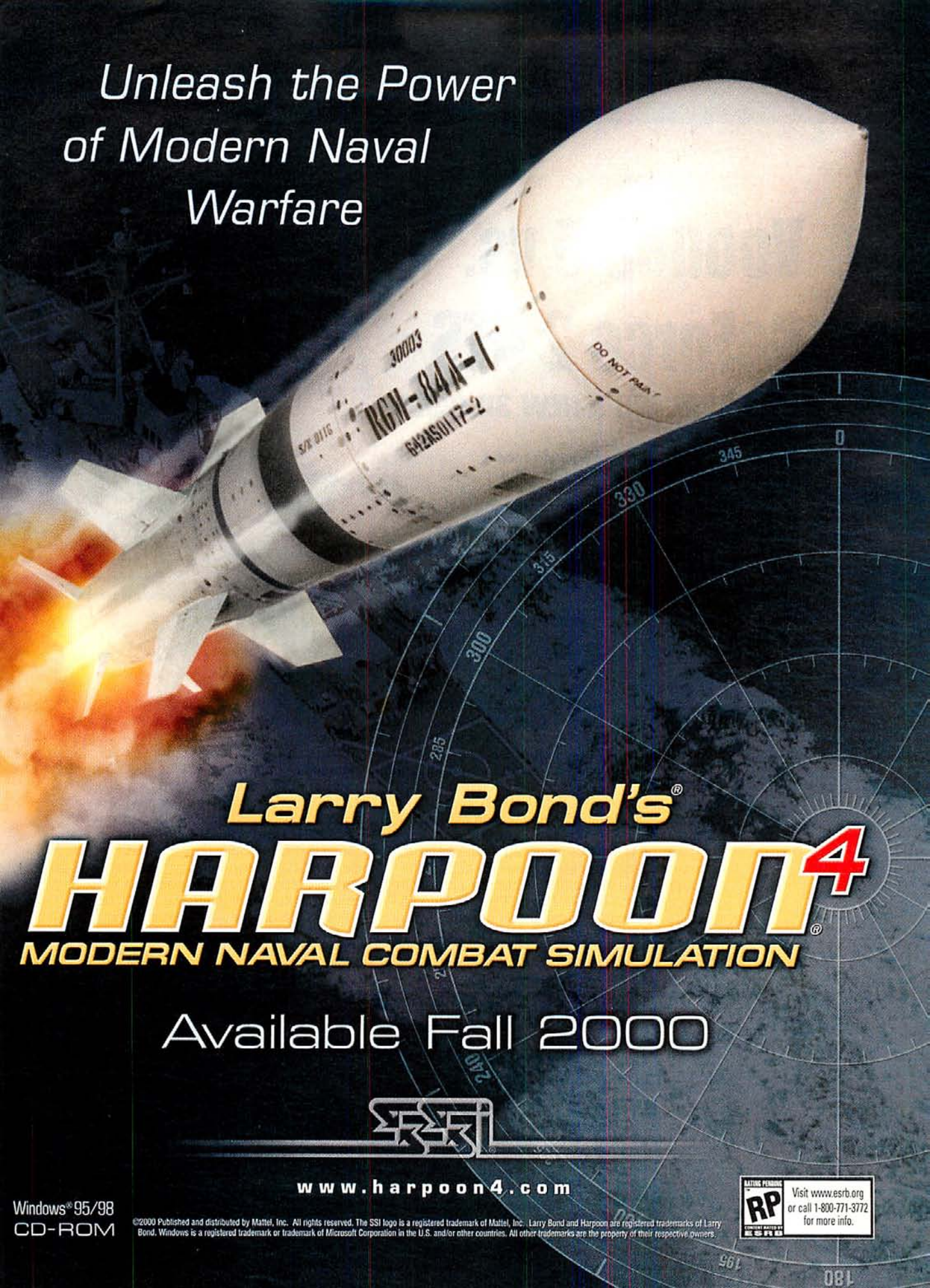
Genre: Racing • **Publisher:** Infogrames • **Developer:** Xpiral • $20 • www.us.infogrames.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

All any racing game needs to do is to recreate the experience of driving the real-life versions of the cars it depicts. Held up to that standard, BEETLE BUGGIN' from Infogrames is a near-perfect replication of the unique sensation of owning and driving an older Volkswagon. And I should know; my first car was a blue 1971 Super Beetle.

★★½☆☆

For starters, the game looks more cartoony than real, just like a real VW. The cars handle like crap, just like a real VW. Sound effects are tinny and farty, just like a real VW. And, of course, I would be mortified if anyone saw me driving it, just like a real VW. Still, the game has a weird fun factor to it, thanks in part to the myriad play options like baja, monster-truck, and speedway racing; and the inclusion of VW's outside-the-bug line like Karman Ghias, Things, and buses. Fans of the automaker will get a kick out of it, but the rest of us will only experience small flashes of fahrvergnügen. *–Tom Price*

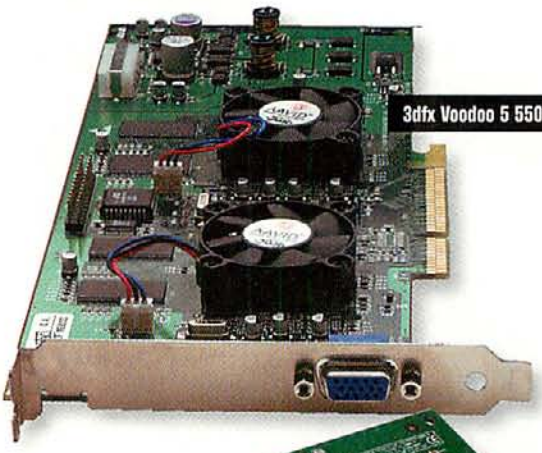



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3D CARD SLAP-DOWN

Voodoo 5 vs. GeForce 2 GTS

IS IT TIME FOR A NEW 3D CARD?


3dfx Voodoo 5 5500


ELSA Gladiac GeForce 2 GTS

nVidia's and 3dfx's recent histories read like the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities*—the best of times and the worst of times. nVidia is flying high, having wrested the performance crown from 3dfx and further bolstered by its X-Box design win. The once-mighty 3dfx, on the other hand, has fallen upon hard times and is seeking redemption with its latest, the Voodoo 5 5500. But it looks like redemption will have to wait, because nVidia's GeForce 2 GTS easily bested Voodoo 5, and so nVidia retains the 3D-performance crown.

by Dave Salvator

But given the frequency with which nVidia is cranking out new chips, this begs the question: How often do you need to upgrade your 3D card? Despite the meteroic rise in the processing horsepower of 3D chips, most 3D games still don't take advantage of all the cutting-edge features, mainly because game developers have to aim optimal game performance (read: smooth frame-rate and image quality) at a "baseline" system. And despite the presence of 800MHz+ CPUs, Vooodoo 5, GeForce, and GeForce 2, this baseline system often winds up being somewhere in the neighborhood of a system with a Pentium-II 300MHz CPU and a Voodoo 2 3D card. And if the game is being marketed internationally, that baseline system may be slower yet, because PCs in Europe and Asia are generally slower. Some games are very clever about scaling up their rendering features and even their 3D models' triangle counts, depending on what hardware the game finds when it starts up; but others aren't, and you wind up with a game that looks the same but just runs that much faster. So in this roundup, we start by testing a TNT 2-based 3D card, and compare its performance to GeForce, GeForce 2 GTS, and Voodoo 5 to show you what making the move to these newer cards buys you. So with that said, let's have at it.

Full-Scene Anti-aliasing: Worth the Penalty?

3dfx has made much ado about full-scene anti-aliasing (FSAA) as the next must-have feature. And it would seem that 3dfx also caught nVidia napping on this one, given that nVidia's Direct3D FSAA only works on a few games at press time (as an aside, nVidia's OpenGL FSAA works fine). But the larger questions are: What the hell is FSAA, and given how much it tanks frame-rate, are its image-quality improvements worth the extra performance hit?

FSAA uses a technique called super-sampling that basically takes an entire 3D scene, and scales it up to a higher resolution. It then scales the scene back down to the original resolution using what's called a down-sampling filtering algorithm to help clean up three things: texture crawling, pixel-popping, and "jaggies." Texture crawling and pixel-popping are most visible in large 3D environments, like flight

3D CARD ROUNDUP

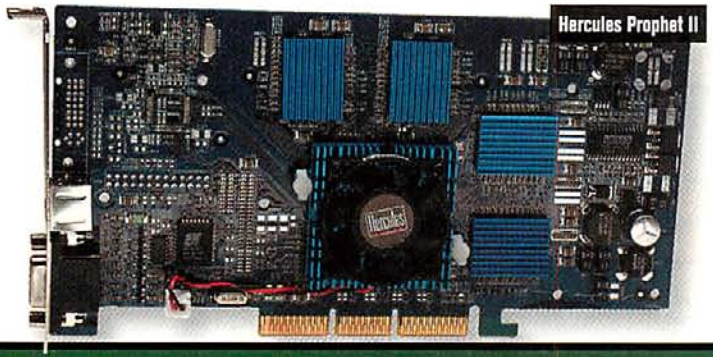
RUNNING THE NUMBERS: To make these results a little more digestible, we've normalized all test data to the baseline TNT 2 card we tested. That's a fancy way of saying that we equated all TNT 2 test results to 100, and calculated all other test results relative to the TNT 2's results. So, for example, the Hercules Prophet II's 3D GameGauge score is 190.4, meaning it's 90.4% again as fast as the TNT 2 card we tested. These results are from our Intel 933MHz Pentium-III test-bed.

TESTS	TNT2	GeForce SDRAM	GeForce DDR SDRAM	3dfx Voodoo 5 5500	Hercules Prophet II	ELSA Gladiac Geforce 2 GTS	LeadTek WinFast GeForce 2 GTS	Creative Annihilator Pro II
Driver Rev.	3.68	3.68	3.68	1.1	5.16	5.16	5.13	5.22
Engine Clock/Memory Clock	125/140	120/133	120/133	166/166	200/333	200/333	200/333	200/333
3D GameGauge Score	100	150.6	164.5	168.3	190.4	189.3	Incomplete	189.9
3D TESTS								
3D WinBench 2000 (1024x768x32)	100	167.2	208.4	226.0	292.2	290.9	310.4	289.9
3D WinBench 2000 (1600x1200x32), 24-bit Z, double-buffered	100	185.3	250.0	95.7	347.4	345.7	368.1	343.1
QUAKE 3 (1600x1200x32)	100	105.7	121.6	309.1	373.9	371.6	392.0	369.3
2D TESTS								
WinBench High-End Graphics WinMark (1024x768x32)	100	101.8	101.8	89.4	102.7	102.7	102.7	101.8
Content Creation WinStone (1280x1024x32)	100	104.5	99.0	82.8	99.3	98.3	100.3	101.0

HOW WE TESTED

To find out who's got the goods and who's blowing smoke, we used our usual suspects for 3D testing, ZD's 3D WinBench 2000, which tests a wide variety of rendering features, and verifies that Direct3D scenes are rendered correctly. We then turned to our own 3D GameGauge, a collection of six Direct3D games [UNREAL TOURNAMENT (3D shooter), NFL FEVER (sports), JANE'S USAF (flight sim), RE'VOLT (racing), EXPENDABLE (3D shooter)] and one OpenGL game (QUAKE 3 ARENA). Then, to really load the 3D cards down with work, we ran several "fill-rate torture tests" at very high resolutions using QUAKE 3, EXPENDABLE, RE'VOLT, and 3D WinBench. We also ran WinBench's Business and High-End Graphics WinMark tests, as well as WinStone's Content Creation benchmark, all of which gauge 2D-graphics performance running a wide variety of Windows applications.

We ran our tests on two platforms. The first had an AMD Athlon 850MHz CPU with an AMD Irongate-based chipset, 128MB of PC133 system memory. The second testbed was a 933MHz Pentium-III running on Intel's 820 chipset, with 128MB of RDRAM, SB Live sound card, and EIDE storage components. Common elements in both systems included a SB Live sound card, EIDE storage components, and fresh installs of Windows 98 SE and DirectX 7.0a.



Hercules Prophet II

The Winner(s)

In an era of commodity parts and reference drivers, it's increasingly difficult for board makers to differentiate themselves. "Unique" features often take the form of driver control-panel enhancements, or in ELSA's case, Revelator 3D shutter glasses. But in terms of performance, all of the GeForce 2 GTS-based boards were nearly identical. So we then looked at price/performance, and here again, the boards' similar pricing didn't make determining the winner any easier. But a few other factors came into play. LeadTek's board

sims, driving titles, and some sports games. Textures on distant objects appear to crawl on the object as you move toward it. An example of pixel-popping would be the yard-line markers on a football game's playing field disappearing and reappearing as the camera moves over the field.

During testing, we could see some instances where FSAA helped clean up image quality, like in JANE'S USAF and NEED FOR SPEED: PORSCHE UNLEASHED. But we also did two runs of 3D GameGauge and 3D WinBench at our standard resolution of 1024x768 to see how much FSAA costs in terms of frame-rate, and it exacts a very heavy toll. On 3D GameGauge, the overall score was 63% slower with FSAA dialed all the way up, and 3D WinBench was a joy-killing 81% slower. And while some games maintained a playable frame-rate, half the tests didn't. 3dfx claims that you can drop down to 800x600 with FSAA dialed up to improve frame-rate, and the performance does get somewhat better.

But given that Voodoo 5 is already delivering GeForce-level performance, and that the image-quality improvements FSAA delivers are pretty subtle, 3dfx's story doesn't hold water with us. Yes, nVidia needs to get their FSAA driver fixed in Direct3D, and they will. But we'd rather err on the side of performance and run at higher resolution, which also helps clean up the image quality.

had a crash problem running JANE'S USAF on both AMD- and Intel-based platforms, and also displayed the nVidia watermark on all Direct3D apps—despite our efforts to disable this "feature" in the driver control panel. We calculated a price/performance ratio using 3D GameGauge scores, and while it was close, the nod goes to Hercules' Prophet II, though ELSA's Gladiac GeForce 2 GTS—despite its ridiculous name—also was right up there. Creative's Annihilator Pro performed well, and has slick-looking control-panel software, but it crashed running NFL FEVER on our AMD Athlon testbed, and had a higher street price at press time. 3dfx's Voodoo 5 5500 ran solidly, without a single complaint, and on the AMD testbed, posted solid test numbers versus GeForce 2 GTS-based cards. But on our Intel testbed, Voodoo 5 didn't scale as well as cards using nVidia's newest chipset, and Voodoo 5 wound up with performance closer to a GeForce-based card; a fast performer, but with the arrival of GeForce 2 GTS, not the fastest.


Creative Annihilator Pro II



LeadTek WinFast GeForce 2 GTS

How Do I Know When It's Time?

If you're running on a TNT 2-, Matrox G400-, Voodoo 3-, or ATI Rage 128-based 3D card, you may be starting to see some of the newest games slow down. If you're still working that Voodoo 2 card, although it has been a stalwart 3D card, by now it's seriously running out of gas. But before you go dropping another $300 on a new 3D card, there are some obvious trade-offs you can make—dialing down rendering features or running at a lower resolution. But if you're reaching the point that even these remedies aren't getting it done, it's time to consider new hardware.

So how much more performance do you get for your money? Well, if you're moving from a TNT 2-based card, a GeForce 2 GTS-based card will net you between two and three times the performance you're currently getting, assuming your CPU is at least 500MHz.

Appreciate that 3D graphics hammer every part of your system, so as a 3D-rendering system, it can only be as fast as its slowest part. So if your CPU is less than 500MHz, you won't see as much performance increase because your rig is "CPU-bound," meaning that the 3D card is essentially twiddling its thumbs waiting for the CPU to throw it more work to do. But at 500MHz or better, you should see a pretty healthy performance gain. Going from a TNT 2-based card to a first-generation GeForce-based card will yield between half again and twice the 3D performance, again assuming your CPU is up to snuff.

In terms of money paid versus performance gained, first-generation GeForce-based cards might look appealing with their falling price tags. But, you also have to think about the future, and try to buy yourself more time until you're staring down your next 3D-card upgrade. But all told, despite nVidia's break-neck clip of pumping out new chips, replacing your 3D card is pretty much an annual ritual. CGW

3D CARD FEATURES

FEATURES	Hercules Prophet II	ELSA Gladiac GeForce 2 GTS	LeadTek WinFast GeForce 2 GTS	Creative Annihilator Pro II	3dfx Voodoo 5 5500
Engine/Memory Clock Speeds	200/333	200/333	200/333	200/333	166/166
Memory (Amount/Type)	32MB/DDR SDRAM	32MB/DDR SDRAM	32MB/DDR SDRAM	32MB/DDR SDRAM	64MB/SGRAM
Street Price	$310	$320	$320	$350	$300
3D GameGauge Score	76.58	76.11	Incomplete	76.36	67.67
Price/Performance Ratio (lower is better)	4.05	4.20	N/A	4.58	4.43
The Skinny	Solid overall performer; crash-free; competitive price	Another solid performer, right up there with Hercules	Good performance, but feels like a repackaged reference board; two crash bugs	Ran neck-and-neck with other GeForce 2-based boards; cool control panels; one crash bug	Pretty good performance and slick control panels, but has to draw power from a hard-disk power connector
CGW Rating	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★½
Web	www.hercules.com	www.elsa.com	www.leadtek.com.tw	www.creative.com	www.3dfx.com

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Under the Hood

BY DAVE SALVATOR



cgw_hardware@ziffdavis.com

X-Box: Friend or Foe?

Game consoles simplify hardware headaches, but at what cost?

Since Microsoft entered the console wars with the announcement of the X-Box, most industry analysts have talked about how the X-Box will affect the PlayStation 2. But where does the PC stand in all this? From a hardware standpoint, is there an upside to X-Box for PC gamers? Game consoles almost never crash. Console controllers are truly plug-and-play. A console's operating system doesn't get so junked up that the only real solution is to nuke the S.O.B. and start anew. Irrespective of gaming tastes, these are things any gamer would welcome. Of course, consoles can't be upgraded. They can't run your business apps, and who the hell wants to surf the Web on their TV?

But hopefully, some X-box technologies will make their way to the PC, like a lean and mean Windows 2000 kernel that can run PC games faster. Having controllers that just plug in and work would be cool, too. And X-Box's SGI-like unified memory architecture (UMA) could enable lower system cost with better 3D performance for PCs, since you'd have a single pool of fast memory, instead of the two somewhat redundant ones (system memory/video memory) that we have now.

Maybe the time has come to consider the possibility of a "disposable" gaming rig. I know—a rather heretical notion, especially coming from a PC hardware guy. With hardcore gearheads (yes, I'm a card-carrying member), you'd have to pry the electric screwdriver from our cold, dead fingers.

But the truth is, not every gamer wants to go poking and prodding the netherregions of their system. And if they don't want to know all the gory details, then dammit, they shouldn't have to.

Say Hello to My Little Friend...

Now, most sub-$1,000 PCs are in that price range for a good reason—lowball components, slow CPUs, lame 3D acceleration, and anemic sound. X-Box will retail for around $300, and at that price, Microsoft will most likely be losing money on every box it sells. But take a similar concept, beef-up its components—say, an 900MHz Pentium-III/Athlon CPU, a GeForce 2-based 3D chipset and a solid audio chipset on the motherboard, a DVD-drive, and 128MB of total memory—and put it into a closed box. Give it FireWire for its storage components and USB for your keyboard, mouse, and controllers. Put the fundamental core of the operating system in a ROM chip, so games couldn't muck it up, and push the thing out the door for around $800. When it gets to the point that your newest games are starting to falter, it's time for a new box. Yes, this is an incomplete system. You still need speakers and a monitor, a big hard drive, and whatever peripherals you'd want. But all of those components could be migrated from one closed box to the next. In effect, this would make motherboard/CPU/3D-card swaps a singular process.

Now, there are some serious downsides, most notably a very limited choice of 3D graphics and sound components, and the flexibility and upgradability that PC gamers enjoy would be sacrificed at the altar. And that really is the crux of the issue—are PC gamers willing to give up their freedom of choice, and the ability to swap components in and out at will, in the name of stability and greater simplicity? Because it is this very flexibility and upgradability, coupled with the myriad combinations of sometimes incompatible components, that gets the newbies—and even the grizzled vets—into such trouble. This also forces game developers to consult a crystal ball to figure out which platform we'll be running when their game ships the next year.

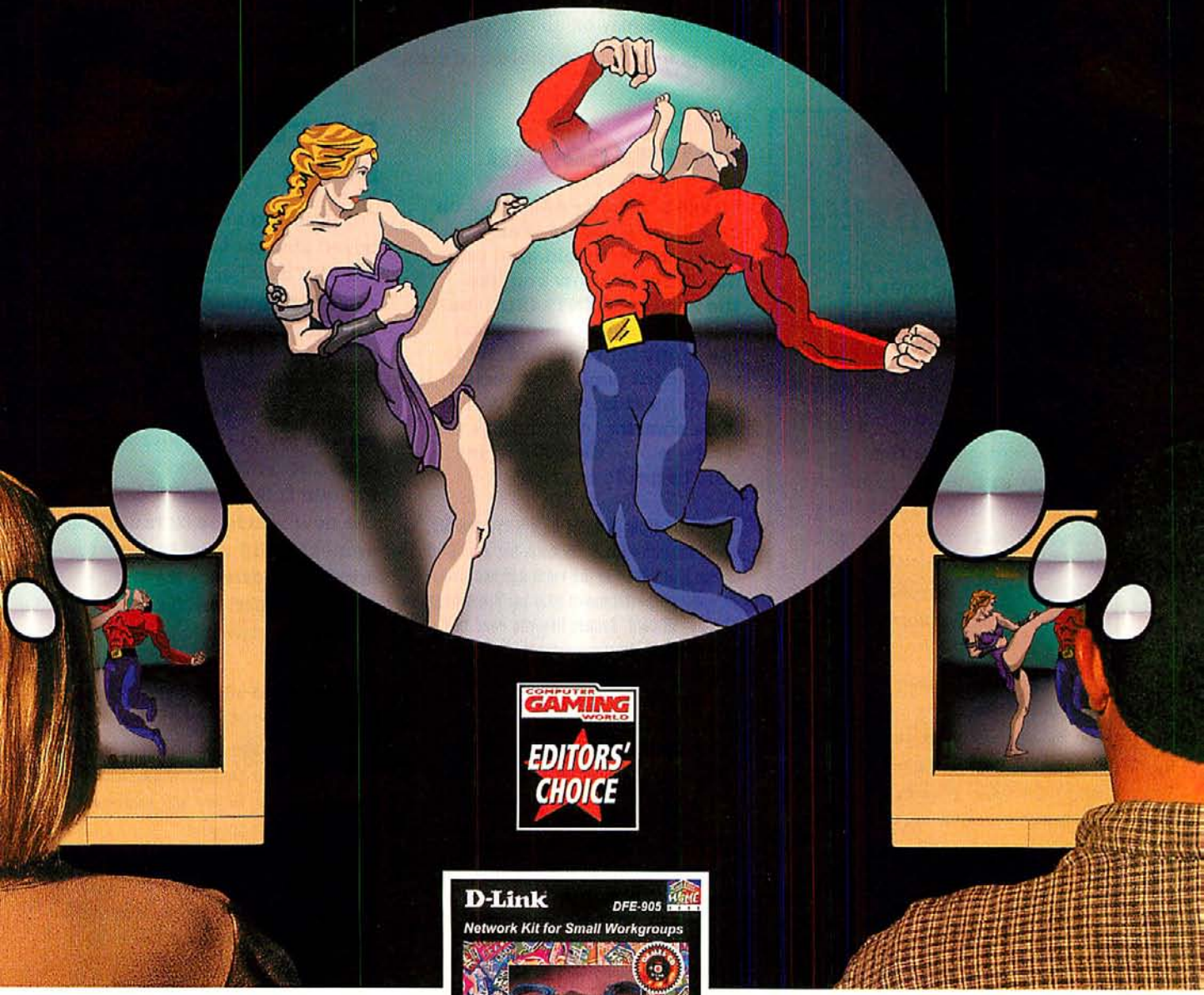
Is it time to consider the once-heretical notion of a 'disposable' gaming rig?

Adapt or Perish

The $3,000+ beige box is something of an endangered species, and like any such animal, the PC has to adapt or face extinction. I'm not proposing that the Dells, Compaqs, and Gateways of this world abandon their current offerings and start cranking out X-PCs. And component choice is a still a good thing. But PC makers need to read the writing on the wall, and keep stealing pages from The Console Book of Simplicity in order to keep PC gaming growing and competitive versus an ever-growing console-gaming market segment. In other words: Let us be gamers, and not game-hardware troubleshooters. The cost of our freedom, it would seem, is eternal upgrade vigilance.

A bittersweet footnote: *I take over this column with some very big shoes to fill. Loyd Case's insightful words have graced this page for nearly five years. Fortunately for us, his departure is incomplete. You'll still see Loyd reviewing audio gear, game controllers, and the occasional game.* CGW

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Tech Medics



You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by Dave Salvator and Greg Fortune

Wounded on the technological front? Our medics may be able to patch you up and get you back into the action. Send your gaming-related technical questions to **cgw_hardware@zd.com**.

I SCREAM AT BLUE SCREEN

When I boot-up, I get the blue screen of death that says, "A fatal OE has occurred 0028:C14E515B in VXD EMU10K1(01)." Everything seems to run okay; I can get on the Internet and listen to music. My system has a Tyan S1837 Thunderbolt motherboard, a Voodoo-III 2000 AGP, a Sound Blaster Live X Gamer card, and an Intel Pentium-III 600.

The EMU10K VxD driver belongs to your Sound Blaster Live X Gamer card. Go to Creative's site, **www.creative.com**, and download their latest drivers. Creative has a driver updater that installs on top of your current driver. After upgrading your driver and rebooting, see if you still get the error message. If so, then your Sound Blaster Live card may have a physical defect, and you should talk to Creative about getting a replacement board.

BAD MUTHABOARD

I have a 550MHz AMD K6-2 on an ASUS P5a board. This board is a little old, and only has AGP 1. I know you like the Xentor 32 TNT2 Ultra, but my motherboard can't push the amps for that card. What video card would you recommend for this system? Would it be smarter to spend $75 for a new motherboard and be able to get Xentor 32?

A new motherboard would be a $75 Band-Aid. It will support a faster 3D card, but your CPU is now pretty long in the tooth and will dampen whatever performance gain you'd get from the new 3D card. Sounds like you need to consider more drastic measures. Consider a new CPU/motherboard, like an AMD Athlon 600MHz CPU ($150), and the Gigabyte 71X motherboard ($120). 128MB of PC133 SDRAM will run about $90. Now we're up to $360, and you still don't have a 3D card. But add the Creative Labs Annihilator Pro ($240), and for about $500, you've got yourself a very competent system. Yes, it's an awful lot more than the $75 you originally wanted to spend, but 3D performance is a function of having a balanced system, and trying to patch your current system with a newer motherboard probably isn't the way to go.

DON'T GLIDE, SOAR

I'm building an Athlon 700-based system with an MIS MS-6167 motherboard. I'm considering the Creative Labs Annihilator Pro AGP you had in the Lean Machine in June. I have a Maxi-Gamer 3D Voodoo 2 PCI pass-through card in my old 200MHz MMX machine. Will I need to include this Voodoo 2 card in the new machine to run Glide games? Will I need to look for additional drivers for the graphics, AGP, or the IDE bus-mastering driver?

If you've got Glide-only titles you still like to play, then you'll want to migrate that Voodoo2 card to your new system. Creative tried to do a Glide emulator at one point, but it didn't take hold, so only 3dfx hardware supports the Glide standard.

Very few new titles are Glide-only, however, and for those titles that support both Glide and Direct3D, you'll want to play those on the Annihilator Pro—since the GeForce chipset is much faster than Voodoo2.

TECHTIP STOP THE COOKIE MONSTER

Like it or not, every move you make on the Web is probably being tracked. No, it's not the government or Microsoft – it's worse. Thanks to those little text files called cookies, you are being tracked by... *marketing people*. Even if the site you visit isn't using cookies, the banner ads within the site almost certainly are. Doubleclick.net, probably the most infamous Internet marketer using these tactics, plants a site-tracking cookie on your machine that doesn't expire until 2035!

Sure you can delete these little pests, but the next site you go to will most likely facilitate the planting of another. You can also set your browser to prompt you when a site tries to plant a cookie, but anyone who's tried that will tell you what a pain all those alerts are.

Our answer: Install Cookie Crusher. Cookie Crusher works with your browser's "always prompt" cookie setting to automatically filter out all unwanted cookies, while allowing those sites you don't mind setting cookies to function normally. The Limit Software will even bundle Cookie Crusher with CyberClean, which erases all traces of your online travels from your machine, all for only $20. If your privacy is worth 20 bucks, check this out at **www.thelimitsoft.com**.

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Killer Rigs



Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
YY Minicube case	Yeong Yang	$213	Lots of cooling
Motherboard	Asus P3C-E	$170	AGP 4x
NEW CPU	Intel Pentium-III 933	$880	Not a Gigahertz, but you can buy it
Memory	128MB of PC800 RDRAM	$500	RAMBUS, baby!
Disk Controller	Adaptec 29160	$190	Slightly faster, but also PCI 64 support
NEW Primary Graphics	Hercules 3D Prophet II	$420	GeForce-2 GTS: The 3D speed king
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20	You still have to have one
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 10k - II	$545	Now at 36GB
Backup	Creative DVD-RAM drive	$599	5.2 gigs of backup
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD-303S	$135	New Pioneer Slot-Drive DVD
Monitor	Mitsubishi DiamondPro 2040u	$1,100	Perfectly flat; good USB support
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live Platinum	$160	For four-speaker DirectSound, A3D, and EAX
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA4800	$199	Loud, clean, uncolored, and fabulous
Modem	3Com SDSL modem	$400	DSL at last
Networking	3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI	$40	Reach out and frag someone
Networking Hub	Netgear DS108	$100	Multiplayer & DSL modem support
Power Supply	PC Power and Cooling Turbocool 300	$99	More power, Scotty!
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$59	In with the Newtouch, out with the Natural
Mouse/Pointing Device	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer	$60	No balls!
		Total w/o Game Controllers	$5,889
Flight Joystick	CH F16 Combatstick USB	$65	It just feels right
Rudder Pedals	CH Pro Pedals USB	$100	Nearly perfect foot placement
Driving Controls	ECCI CDS 4000	$1,250	For the serious sim driver
Gamepad	Interact Hammerhead FX	$40	DualShock-like, force-feedback controller
		Total	$7,344

The Fine Print: All recommendations based on actual evaluations and testing. Prices listed are average low quotes from Web price search engines like **www.computershopper.com** or **www.pricewatch.com**.

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Motherboard	Gigabyte 71X
NEW CPU	Athlon 900 w/ cooling fa
Memory	128MB PC100 SDRAM
Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA/33
NEW Primary Graphics	Creative Labs Annihilator
Floppy Drive	Teac
Hard Drive	Maxtor Diamondmax 6800 Plus
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer DVD-114
Monitor	Optiquest Q95
Primary Audio	Aureal SQ2500
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA-635
Modem	Actiontec PCI Call-Waiting Mode
Case	Elan Vital T10-AB
Power Supply	Antec 300W
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse
Joystick	Logitech Wingman Extreme Digi
Gamepad	Gravis Gamepad USB

KILLER RIGS IN A BOX

Want a full-bore gaming beast without having to build it? We've got you covered. These two systems tested very well, and will put you into the fray without your ever having to charge up the electric screwdriver.



Power Rig

Alienware's Area 51 Aurora took no prisoners in our recent testing, and its latest AMD Athlon-based rig pushes the CPU speed up to 1GHz. The Aurora is also packing 256MB of PC133 SDRAM for system memory, along with a GeForce 2 GTS-based 3D card with 32MB of DDR SDRAM, Klipsch's testicular four-channel ProMedia V.2-400 speakers, and, it comes in black.

Alienware's Area 51 ▪ $4,680 as configured ▪ (800) 494-3382 ▪ www.alienware.com



Lean Machine

In addition to its high-end rigs, Dell also puts together very solid bang-for-the-buck-type systems as well. Thanks in large part to its high-volume buying power, Dell's Dimension XPS T comes in at just under $1,900 and includes a 700MHz Pentium-III, 128MB of RDRAM, a 32MB DDR GeForce 3D card, 17-inch monitor, 10GB hard drive, and a decent set of Harmon-Kardon speakers.

Dell Dimension XPS T ▪ $1,899 as configured ▪ www.dell.com

Hey! The Lean Machine's CPU is almost as fast as the Power Rig's. What gives?

You probably noticed that this month's Power Rig has only the thinnest of CPU clock advantages versus the Lean Machine. We can explain. High-clock Pentium-IIIs are still hard for individual buyers to find cheaply, whereas AMD seems able to get their high-clock offerings out there in greater quantity – probably because they don't have every PC maker out there gobbling up their available supply (yet). But their loss is your gain, and the fact that you can put together a 900MHz box for just under two grand is like hitting the number in the hardware lottery. Appreciate that at these high clock-rates, we're talking a difference of 3.7%, which will barely show up in actual performance tests, proving once again that the line between these two systems continues to blur.

Price	The Skinny
$110	Solid, stable Athlon motherboard
$580	**Damn near a gigahertz. Feel the love**
$100	128MB, squeezed in
$0	It's in there
$240	**Went for 32-bits, T&L, & DDR**
$20	Still gotta have it
$130	Fast and cheap
$140	Slot-drive DVD
$300	Solid 19" monitor at a budget price
$49	A3D and clean audio for under a C-note
$70	Went back to my favorites
$70	Solid performance, good price
$75	Back to the old familiar
$49	Drunk with power
$24	Cheap, with handy add-on buttons
$30	Better than the "gaming" mouse
$39	Cheap, decent 3D stick
$30	Solid, basic gamepad
Total	**$2,056**

WHICH 3D CARD SHOULD I BUY?

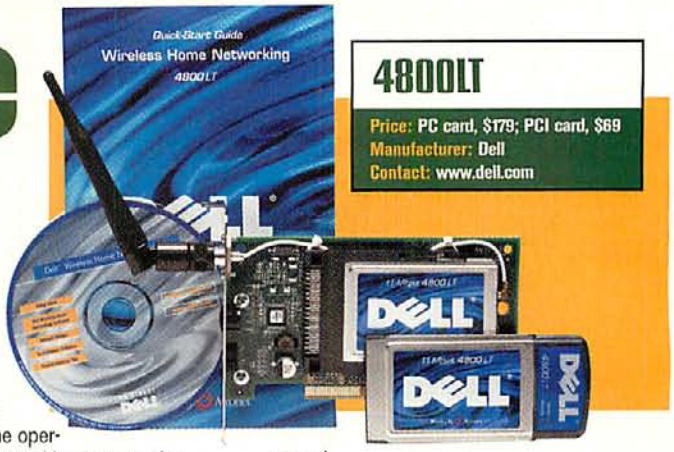
Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and your motherboard, so we have two recommendations for you:

For a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or a PCI motherboard (no AGP), or a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, get 3dfx's Voodoo3 3000 PCI board. At just under $150, the V3 3000 delivers good price/performance, and will do a good job with current games, and should still move upcoming games along OK. The best part is that when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the Voodoo3 board to the new setup and use it there, until you decide to get an AGP-based 3D card.

For motherboards with AGP, we recommend Hercules' 3D Prophet II, based on nVidia's GeForce 2 GTS chipset, which took top honors in our latest round of 3D testing. This board has 32MB of DDR SDRAM, and if your monitor can tolerate it, try booting your favorite game up at 1600x1200 – you'll be surprised how well things keep moving. At $420, this board doesn't come cheap. If money is an object, its now-one-generation-back predecessor, the GeForce-based 3D Prophet, is $299 at press time. It should be under $250 by the time you're reading this.

Copper-Free Gaming

Dell's wireless LAN offering turns you loose



4800LT

Price: PC card, $179; PCI card, $69
Manufacturer: Dell
Contact: www.dell.com

Wireless home-networking kits have made gamers trade speed for convenience.

But system-maker Dell has jumped into the networking fray with its new 4800LT, a wireless networking rig that Dell rates at 11Mbps, ten times faster than most first-generation wireless offerings. But there's just one problem: In our file-transfer tests, the 4800LT didn't even come close to that data rate, despite excellent sub-10-millisecond ping times and smooth LAN-based multiplayer gaming performance.

Dell includes setup videos on their CD-ROM, and it does a pretty good job of walking the networking newbie through the installation process. Dell's application masks most of the protocol stack configuration dreck; you may still wind up having to do some protocol tweaking.

The 4800LT has a PC card adapter for laptops, a PCI card for desktop machines, and an optional base station for letting multiple machines all talk to a shared Internet connection. Dell quotes the operating range at 200 feet, and in our tests, the LT4800 PC cards plugged into two laptops ran without a hitch at that distance. With obstructions (walls, furniture, pets, etc.), the operating range falls to about 75 feet. In a multiplayer tear through MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2, we saw smooth gameplay with no player-warping due to data packet loss.

Things were looking up until we tried file-transfer tests at various distances. The best data rate we could get the 4800LT to muster was around 3.7Mbits/sec, a far cry from the advertised 11Mbits/sec data rate. And we only got this data rate at point-blank range. At further distances, the transfer rate dipped down to around 2Mbits/sec.

For Internet-connection sharing, Dell bundles SyGate, a competent-enough utility that suffers a common problem among such animals: The rig(s) that are piggybacking on the Internet-connected machine often can't see game servers; or if they can, then the Internet-connected box can't.

Dell has a good – albeit somewhat pricey – wireless networking kit that raises the speed bar for wireless, but unfortunately, not as much as their advertising would have you believe. But the PCI networking cards are more reasonably priced, and the 4800LT does deliver excellent wireless gaming performance. If you're looking to get off the leash, the 4800LT can set you free. *–Dave Salvator*

CAMBRIDGE SOUNDWORKS DTT-2500 SPEAKERS

Price: $299
Manufacturer: Cambridge SoundWorks
Contact: www.hifi.com

Call it the Ginsu knife of speakers. Cambridge SoundWorks' DTT-2500s can handle 2.1 stereo, 4.1 DirectSound games, and 5.1 Dolby Digital from DVD movies. The $300 price tag may seem a little steep, but check this out: At press time, Cambridge was throwing in a FREE DVD player, and that deal may still be running as you read this.

Setup is painless. Just connect your sound card's two outputs (front and rear) and whatever digital-audio device you choose (DVD-decoder card, or the bundled DVD player), and you're good to go. Controls are pretty straightforward, but you may want to peruse the docs to understand all the modes.

Overall, the DTT 2500s sound good, but they're not overpowering, due to the 69-watt amplifier. Like some other Cambridge offerings, there's a small "hole" in the low/midrange frequencies. The bass unit has pretty good bark, but because of the small amp, don't expect much thorax-rattling. A revisit to HALF-LIFE was made all the sweeter in four-channel glory.

All told, the DTT 2500s combine great versatility, good sound quality, and the free DVD player to create a solid offering. If you're space-impaired and watch DVD movies on your PC, or are just looking for an inexpensive home-theatre rig, give the DTT 2500s a serious listen. *–Dave Salvator*



Product photos by Hayden Houser/DIGITAL CLARITY

SAMSUNG SYNCMASTER MP150

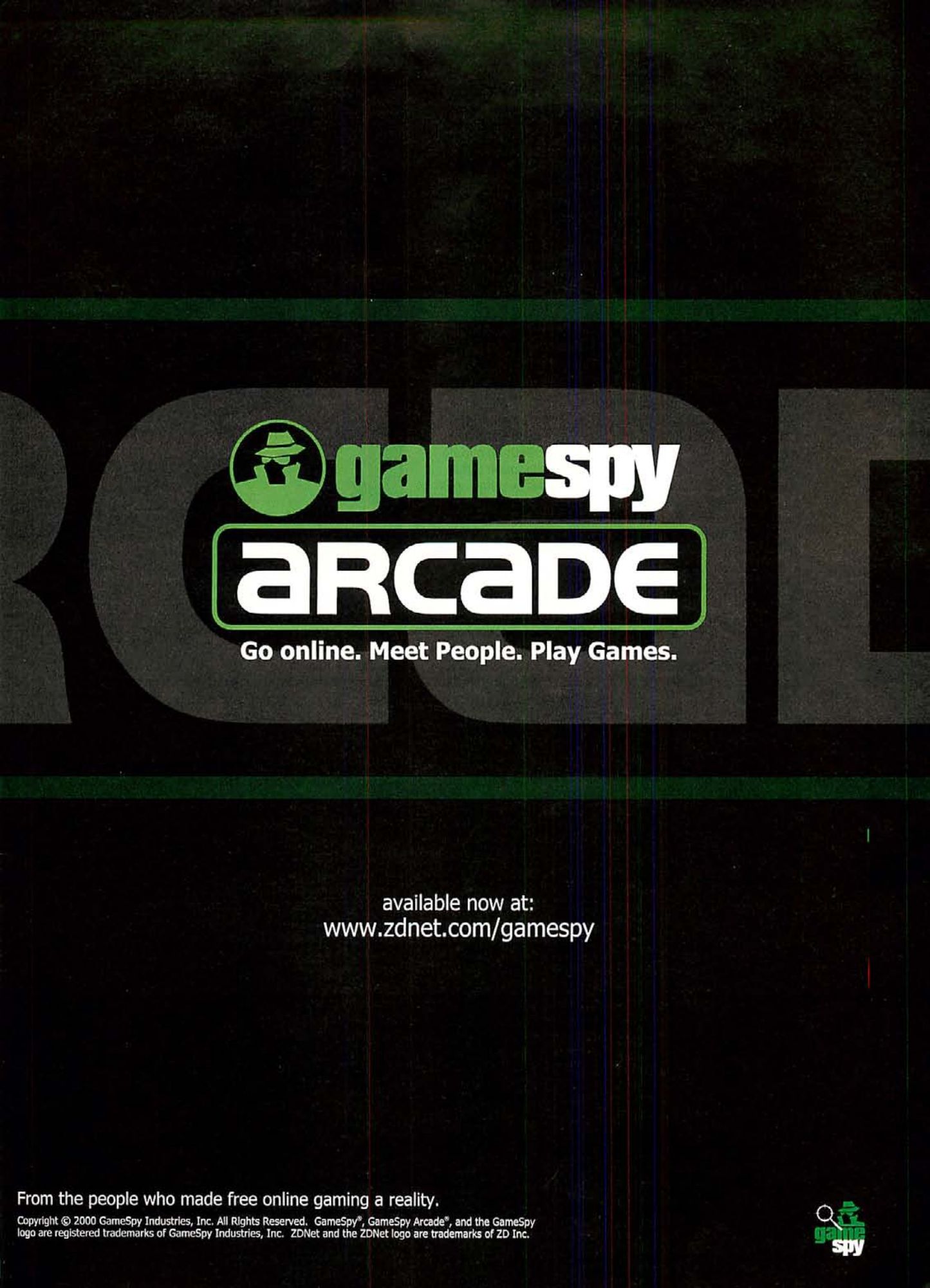
Price: $1,229
Manufacturer: Samsung
Contact: www.samsung.com

Samsung's new SyncMaster MP150 flat-panel monitor is a 3-in-1-display device: a 15" PC monitor, a TV, and a display device with composite and S-video inputs for your VCR, DVD, or game console.

The MP150 is an analog flat-panel, but can run at 1024x768 at 85Hz, so 3D games should keep frame-rates moving along with no interference from the monitor. The display's image quality is very good, with good color saturation; and test images and DVD-movie playback looked solid. The MP150 also has built-in speakers, but like most monitor speakers, their sound quality is pretty anemic and bass response is borderline nonexistent.

The MP150 is a compact package, but comes with a very hefty price tag. And given the rock-bottom prices of 17" and 19" CRT monitors now, there are less expensive ways to put together a small home-entertainment system. *–Dave Salvator*




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INSIDER TIPS ON HOW TO MAKE MAJESTIC HEROES BY TOM CHICK

Majesty

What better gurus for winning at MAJESTY than the developers themselves? We went to the guys at Cyberlore in search of wisdom, and came back with the following pearls.

Intolerance Will Not Be Tolerated!

Thanks to religious intolerance, MAJESTY forces some hard choices when it comes to choosing which temples you want to build. Cyberlore's art director, Seth Spaulding, prefers the Dauros/Agrela combo: "It grants tough fighters (in both Monks and Paladins) and cheap healing spells (Healers)." Jay Adan, their marketing guy, is also fond of Dauros' Paladins "for raw stopping power." If, however, there are dragons afoot, he instead opts for a Temple to Krypta, saying, "those skeletons that the Priestesses summon are invaluable allies against dragons." Cyberlore's lead play-tester, Tao Rodriguez-Seeger, prefers the exclusive Temple to Krolm (Barbarians) in multiplayer games.

MAJESTY'S racial intolerance also creates hard choices; you have to choose between Elves, Dwarves, or Gnomes. "The Dwarves bring with them the best defensive punch in the form of the Ballista Tower," says Rodriguez-Seeger. Although most of the guys at Cyberlore have a soft spot in their hearts for Gnomes, they can't deny the importance of Elves for an economy. Spaulding proclaims, "Elves, all the way...the marketplace bonus is too good to pass up. But, in missions where I know I'll be hit early and hard, Gnomes may be the only option."

Wise and Wily Wizards

When it comes to building Wizards' Guilds and extending the range of spells with Wizards' Towers, there's less agreement. "I lean away from spells when my economy is delicate," says Spaulding. MAJESTY'S lead designer, Jim DuBois, is usually content to just build a guild and let the Wizards do their thing. "I dislike building Wizards' Towers on the map, so I only do it in the rare quest where I can't help it," he says. But when he does research player spells, he follows a particular path. "Healing is the spell I look for first in a game, then Resurrection or Re-Animate. Then Vines or Petrify for later."



THOSE WACKY WIZARDS If you have the money to spare, and need extra firepower, go for the Wizards' Guild.

"I really like to have Wizards in my kingdom because of the extra firepower that they can bring to a battle," says Adan. "If it weren't for the Invisibility spell, I don't think they'd survive long enough to get some of the better spells. A little Invisibility can go a long way towards protecting the Wizards at low levels."

We Can Be Heroes

As for favorite hero types, Cyberlore's choices are based on personal preference as much as strategy. "The Priestess and her skeletons are great and unusual compared to the other heroes," says DuBois, "but in terms of which hero has the most character or personality, I would have to say I like the Rogue best."

Adan is also a Rogue fan. "If you recruit them early, they make great scouts because they'll go after almost any reward, regardless of the amount, then they'll run away at the first sign of danger. Of course, the poison that you can get when you upgrade their guild is helpful as well. It also makes their attacks much more effective."

Rodriguez-Seeger is partial to the self-supporting Paladin/Healer combo because they require the least amount of management. Last of all, Spaulding, who roots for the underdog, is a Gnome fan at heart. "If I see one in a fight, I'll heal him up all-fight-long just to see him level up." CGW

JUST GNOMING AROUND If you know you're gonna be hit early and hard, go for a Gnome like this guy.



GREED IS GOOD Sure, this Rogue is greedy, but that's what makes him a great scout.



HEY, WHO INVITED SKELETONS? Priestesses and their skeletons make for very useful heroes.



HOLY MIGHT Give her a healer, then stand back and watch her deliver the hurt.



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MATURE M ESRB

Sword of the Berserk: Guts' Rage™

TEEN T ESRB

Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation™

Rising Sun

More Honor, Less Seppuku When Playing the Japanese

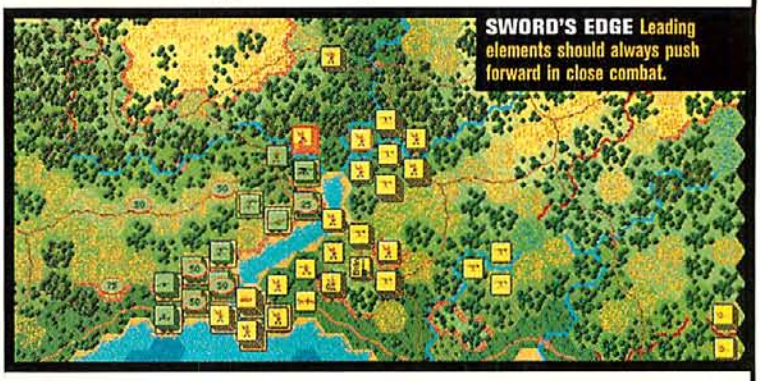
By Bruce Geryk

Playing the Japanese in RISING SUN requires a very different style of play than would be called for with the Allies. The Imperial Japanese Army is a difficult weapon to wield, yet a very dangerous one in the right hands. The key to playing the Japanese is to emphasize their strengths—assault and morale—while minimizing their most glaring weakness, firepower.

Maintain Closure

Because a Japanese first-line Rifle Platoon has only about half the firepower (at all ranges) of a U.S. Marine Platoon (after 1942), trading gunfire as the Japanese with an American infantry force is akin to committing a particularly pointless act of *seppuku*. Instead, good Japanese commanders will always endeavor to position their troops in order to initiate close combat at the earliest opportunity, where the Sons of Nippon are much more likely to emerge victorious.

Closing with an alert, well-armed Allied force can also be suicidal, if done improperly. Fortunately for the Japanese, the terrain of RISING SUN is particularly suited to closing with an enemy without suffering excessive casualties. While the Russians in EAST FRONT have to cross the open steppe in many cases, the Japanese are usually under cover of jungle. That decreases not only the likelihood of sustaining casualties from gunfire (even light jungle has a 70% terrain modifier) but also of being seen, since lines of sight are often very short. When moving, it's often helpful to choose "Visible Hexes" under the Display menu to ascertain which hexes will keep you out of enemy sight while still closing the distance. Unless a scenario is very short, the roundabout way can be the best way to go.



SWORD'S EDGE Leading elements should always push forward in close combat.

A Happy Soldier Is a Mighty Soldier

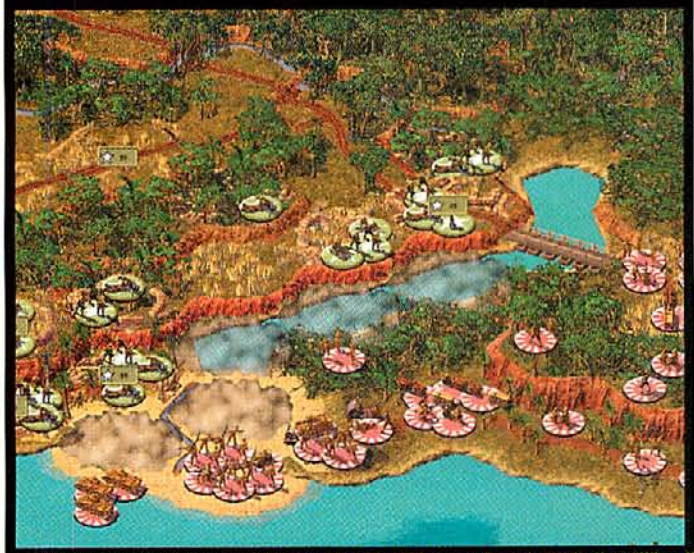
The high Japanese morale is a big advantage when trying to come to grips quickly. Since a failed morale check can cause a strength point loss—in addition to ending movement for the turn—the unshakeable Japanese have an advantage when advancing under fire. It's usually advisable to limit the Allies' chances for opportunity fire, but Japanese commanders should not rule out making a mad dash across open ground. If the result will allow an immediate assault to an Allied hex, then the Japanese morale will carry the troops through.

Smokin' Barrels of Banzai

Once it's time to assault, the Japanese can employ the formidable weapon that is the Banzai attack. Because of the Banzai's advantages, Japanese units should always travel within the command radius of their respective leaders and use it whenever possible. One oft-overlooked advantage of Banzai is that there is no cost to enter the enemy's hex (only the 20 APs to assault are assessed). That last dash to close-quarters combat—which would otherwise end in an adjacent hex and expose the attackers to an extra turn of point-blank gunfire—can usually be made from cover, directly into the enemy's foxholes in a single turn.

One of the most important tools in the attacking arsenal is one that is frequently neglected: smoke. High-explosive artillery attacks force a player to guess where the enemy will be, while smoke rounds can be placed where they will best cover one's own assault, eliminating guesswork. Well-placed smoke can go far to negate the Allied firepower advantage, as advancing Japanese troops are safe if the line-of-sight to them is blocked. Sneak, dash, and *banzai!* are the keys to Imperial victory in the Pacific. CGW

CLASH ON THE MATANIKAU Rather than pounding the American positions, use artillery to drop a screen of smoke, then move up behind it.



BANZAI ALL NIGHT LONG No scenario will call for more Banzai attacks than "When the Snow Tiger Pounced."



CGW TIPS

THE SIMS

Career Strategies

Only a fool jumps into the THE SIMS career waters without adequate training. When starting out with a new Sim, build a very modest home, leaving enough money for the Sim to live on for a couple weeks (at least $500) while he or she gets his or her education and establishes a few relationships. Decide which career you want, and then develop the critical skills you'll need for that job path. This strategy will save you lots of time and frustration later on.

Picking the wrong career for your Sim's personality can make their life very difficult. A slothful Athlete or Military Officer is going to go nowhere. And a shy Politician is a candidate only his or her mother will love. The following chart (especially the Critical Traits column) will prove of great help in your career decision.

	Average Salary	Salary Range	Work Day (hrs)	Social Req.	Critical Traits	Primary Skills
ATHLETICS	$554	$110-$1300	6	High	Out, Act	Body, Creative
BUSINESS	$540	$120-$1200	7	High	Out	Logic, Charisma, Creative
CRIME	$532	$140-$1100	6.8	Mod.	Out, Play	Body, Creative, Charisma
ENTERTAINMENT	$565	$100-$1400	6.8	High	Out, Play	Charisma, Body, Creative
LAW	$498	$240-$700	6.4	Mod.	Act	Body, Logic, Charisma
MEDICAL	$521	$200-$850	6.8	Mod.	Act	Logic, Body, Mechanical
MILITARY	$478	$250-$650	6	V. Low	Act	Body, Mechanical, Charisma
POLITICS	$504	$220-$750	7	V. High	Out	Charisma, Logic, Body
SCIENCE	$532	$155-$1000	6	Low	Play	Logic, Creative, Mechanical
XTREME	$530	$175-$925	6	Mod.	Act, Out, Play	Body, Mechanical, Creative

Out=Outgoing, Act=Active, Play=Playful

The social requirements for some career paths (particularly the Political, Entertainment, and Business paths) are very high—perhaps too high for one Sim to handle. The best strategy with these careers is to divide the social workload between a Sim and his or her unemployed spouse. While the working Sim is at the office, the spouse can be the neighborhood social butterfly, flitting from house to house, maintaining old friendships and creating new ones. With this tactic, even a reserved Sim can make it to the top of a social career path, thanks to his or her socialite partner.
–Chris Lombardi



Inside ACTION

BY THIERRY "SCOOTER" NGUYEN

Did HALF-LIFE Scare Off the Shooter?

One title may have chased away an entire game-style



thierry_nguyen@ziffdavis.com

If you want to know what I remember most about action games at E3 this year, it's one phrase: "It's not like HALF-LIFE." There seemed to be a dearth of old-school first-person shooters, where you're shooting goon-after-goon in an interconnected series of levels. Most of the action games I saw at the show had some other twist or gimmick to them, like RED FACTION'S destructible environment *a la* the CRUSADER games; or they were homages to even older games (like RETURN TO WOLFENSTEIN).

Not only were traditional shooters scarce at the show, there hasn't really been a good one since, well, HALF-LIFE. Since then, the games I've been digging have strayed from the traditional formula. SYSTEM SHOCK 2 had role-playing elements in it; TRIBES had the great outdoors combined with slick teamplay; ROGUE SPEAR had unerring realism; UNREAL TOURNAMENT took the competitive gladiators-with-guns model to the extreme. But I can't recall a standard, run-around-a-level-and-blow-stuff-up game that's been at least *enjoyable*.

It seems that HALF-LIFE has placed the bar too high for FPS's—so high that developers aren't even really trying to imitate it, because they realize that any normal shooter will suffer by comparison. HALF-LIFE just seems impossible to top. Consequently, the genre is brimming with new and innovative games. Both HALO and TRIBES 2 look to take "outdoor teamplay" to even madder levels. MAX PAYNE takes the award for the most cinematic shooter out there, reflecting elements of Dirty Harry, Charles Bronson flicks, John Woo flicks, and *The Matrix* all at once. ALICE had levels that seemed borne out of Tim Burton's cracked nut, and UNDYING had the disturbing vision required for a good horror game.

Since everyone is so focused on being new, there's barely anyone sticking with the old. Much like adventure games, the shooter seems to be showing up as an element of other genres. Shooter engines are powering up other genres (ANACHRONOX, SACRIFICE), and the run-and-gun concept itself seems to be confined to certain sequences, instead of being the focus of the game.



HALFWAY TO A HALO In two years of gaming, we've gone from the ultra-refined shooter to the magnificent sci-fi teamplay romp.

Did HALF-LIFE scare off the shooter? Judging from E3, it sure looks like it. Maybe it's just a phase, and shooters will be on the rise at next year's E3. Or, again like adventure games, shooters will fade from the scene and remain relegated to a few dedicated developers. We'll see how long this lack-of-old-school-trend lasts, but for now, HALF-LIFE is the last, great, run-and-gun shooter.

SCOOTER'S MIX (E3 EDITION)

1. METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY
2. HALO
3. MAX PAYNE
4. AMERICAN MCGEE'S ALICE
5. TRIBES 2

(Note: Due to my inability to schedule things, I forgot that this column would be written right after E3. So the promised Q&A with the COUNTERSTRIKE developers has been shifted to next month. Woohoo! Less work for me!)

ACTION GAME OF THE SHOW

That's Quite a Snake You Got There

One game completely and utterly stole the show in the action category: METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY. Even though it was a demo movie of a PlayStation 2 title, major PC players like Cliff Bleszinski, Tom Hall, and George Broussard were showering it with praise. Why was it wowing everyone? It seemed to be a combination of more of the original METAL GEAR SOLID'S already-excellent gameplay, and jaw-dropping graphics. Some jaded naysayers are sticking to the "it was all pre-rendered—that couldn't be gameplay!" argument, despite Konami's "there *is* gameplay!" assertion. While there were some scenes that resembled cutscenes more than game, I'm putting my faith in Konami—mainly because they did the exact same thing for METAL GEAR SOLID; they made all the naysayers eat their words. The original will be coming to the PC soon, so PC gamers can get a taste of the gameplay style. Even if MGS2 never gets ported, it's enough of a reason to get a PS2. It looked *that* good. CGW

Inside STRATEGY

BY ROBERT COFFEY

Where Are All the Strat Games?

What doesn't kill the genre makes it stronger



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Without the assistance of an extra day, or a Ryder truck full of amphetamines, there's just no way to see everything at E3. Fortunately, my annual deathmarch was made much easier this year by the pronounced absence of strategy games. What was going on? Should strategy gamers be worried?

Probably not—the glut of RTS games from the last couple of years was worthier of concern, threatening to bury the genre beneath a seemingly endless, potentially-fatal torrent of dreck like TRIBAL RAGE and DOMINION. The Darwinian bloodbath following that product overload has left a select few, robust games that *earned* their survival. These games were present in a parade of sequels and franchise extensions: DARK REIGN 2, AGE OF EMPIRES II: THE CONQUERORS, RED ALERT 2, WARCRAFT III, and SIMSVILLE.

Does this mean that the strategy market is withering? Not at all. As sure as *Battlestar Galactica* followed *Star Wars*, strategy gamers will have to be patient and wait for the next big bandwagon to roll by and start collecting game designers. The RTS deluge sought to capitalize on what were once original ideas—the next flood of games will do the same.

And what will be the titles most likely to be aped at the next E3? While it's unlikely anyone can duplicate the magic that seems to reverberate throughout BLACK & WHITE, odds are that the game's potential for self-expression—coupled with THE SIMS' addictive lifestyle manipulation—will result in a number of games claiming to be tools for allowing gamers to create their own worlds. Actually, when you consider those games in conjunction with the mad scientist experimentation of Relic's SIGMA, it might suggest that player creativity is the next big thing in strategy gaming. Imagine, a game that will let you attack and solve problems your way within the loose strictures of the gameworld. A game that emphasizes imagination and play as your primary problem-solving mechanisms over simply figuring out when and where the scripted tank attack will happen.

We may actually be on the cusp of a great renaissance in strategy gaming, a lulling quiet before a storm of creativity. Here's hoping the bandwagoneers get it right.

ROBERT'S MIX (E3 EDITION)

1. Tom Price drunkenly kissing Gordon Berg at E3
2. HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2001
3. MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2
4. STARLANCER
5. The Mullet of the Week

CASUAL IMPRESSIONS

Meaty Bite-Sized Morsels

Impressions Games' line of historic city-builders like CAESAR and PHARAOH have long appealed to hardcore gamers. That's great, but Impressions would like to grab the more casual market as well. To that end, their next game—the Greek-themed ZEUS—will break the gameplay into smaller, more easily-digested chunks. Essentially, the hours-long scenarios of the previous game will play out in a series of shorter, faster-paced scenarios, each with mission goals that are stepping stones to creating a larger city-state. It's not a bad move, alleviating some of the intimidation of the earlier games, not to mention the tedium of waiting for a pyramid to be built in PHARAOH. CGW



Ones to Watch

If there's one nice thing about E3, it's the opportunity to see a lot of games side by side so you can spot trends. Some of these games may have shipped by the time you read this, but they could be harbingers of the future.

Battle Realms: While other designers are happy to rework post-apocalyptic gameworlds, Liquid Entertainment is reshaping virtually every key convention of its genre. If it works (and we're thinking it will) RTS gaming may never be the same.

Sigma: Alex Garden and Relic Entertainment again seem poised to broaden the RTS strategy-playing field the way they did with *CGW*'s Strategy Game of the Year, HOMEWORLD. Part game, part virtual genetic laboratory, SIGMA's animal-blending gameplay promises more fun than your first chemistry set.

Ground Control: Stripping C&C-style gameplay down to its action-packed, muscular soul, GROUND CONTROL's futuristic tactical combat may be the next big thing in multiplayer strategy gaming.

Black & White: The ultimate God-game should tap into the same sense of personal involvement that rocketed THE SIMS to the top of the sales charts, with the added boost of an intangible sense of unabashed wonder.

BLACK & WHITE

Inside SIMULATIONS & SPACE

BY GORDON BERG



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Why Less Is More (more or less)

Flight sims down, but far from out

Having just returned from my fifth E3 safari, there's no denying that military sims are an endangered species. Never before in the history of the orgy of electronic gaming known as E3 have there been so few sims to be found on the show floor. This was largely due to one of two reasons: 1) Most publishers just aren't making them anymore and are likely to flinch if you say the word "sim" out loud, as if you've just uttered a vile curse. Who can blame them? They're usually far too expensive to make given the often-lousy returns. TANK PLATOON! anyone? Or 2) Whatever they've got brewing back home, stayed home.

Notably absent from the show this year was the Jane's label from EA. Shown in all its glory last year as FLIGHT COMBAT: THUNDER OVER EUROPE and since renamed ATTACK SQUADRON, this WWII flight sim seems to be the sole remaining title for the PC in the Jane's stable (funny how Jane's WORLD WAR has dropped quietly from the radar). Assurances were given that the product is alive and well, but that's what they said last year about Jane's A-10, wasn't it? Another EA title that was expected to be there and didn't make it was Kesmai's AIR WARRIOR: VIETNAM. Instead of a coming-out party at E3, it's been postponed so that their bread-and-butter WWII franchise can get an overhaul with the technology developed for the Vietnam product.

All Is Lost?

All doom and gloom, right? "Chicken Little" Berg strikes again, yes? Perhaps not. In fact, based on what I saw this year, I'm actually hopeful for the future. Shocking, but true! Besides, it could be a good thing that there are going to be fewer sims out there. Less cutthroat competition might actually give a sim a chance to shine. All of this is moot, of course, if the sim in question sucks. With the exception of JETFIGHTER 4 (sorry, the notion of defending the skies over San Francisco without the inclusion of complex avionics, by default, does not make a sim fun), every kind of sim on display at this year's E3 oozed with potential. Best of all, many were offering a focus on more gameplay, something I mentioned in my April column. For example:

HASBRO'S B-17 II: Hands down the most exciting sim at E3. Finally, a sim that won't make any compromises with regards to reality, yet will be accessible to all sorts of gamers. Since the computer can be set to control just about anything, the player can manage as much or as little as he/she likes, or play any crew-member position. That's right, you don't even have to fly. Couple this with a fully-dynamic cooperative campaign, and there's no end to the replayability.

ROWAN'S BATTLE OF BRITAIN: Based on the award-winning MIG ALLEY engine, Rowan's BOB will offer a real-time strategic commander option that lets you scramble your precious few Spitfires and Hurricanes against the Luftwaffe's infamous Blitz. Furthermore, the goal is to have as many as 1000 planes in the air!

INDEPENDENCE WAR 2: Better graphics, bigger story, open-ended mission structure instead of being scripted—but still I-WAR at its core. That's a good thing.

Every Microsoft Game That Will Use a Joystick: Billionaire or not, Bill Gates has expensive lawyers and plans to pay for his legal fees by enticing you to buy every single one of his games. MECHWARRIOR 4 seems like it's finally hearkening back to its roots, offering a branching campaign structure with the mission choice up to the player's discretion. COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2, strangely enough, will employ a comic-book style for its interface and narrative that will largely succeed where Psygnosis' dismal WINGS OF DESTINY failed miserably. FREELANCER is still a ways off, but you will play it.

GORDON'S MIX (E3 EDITION)

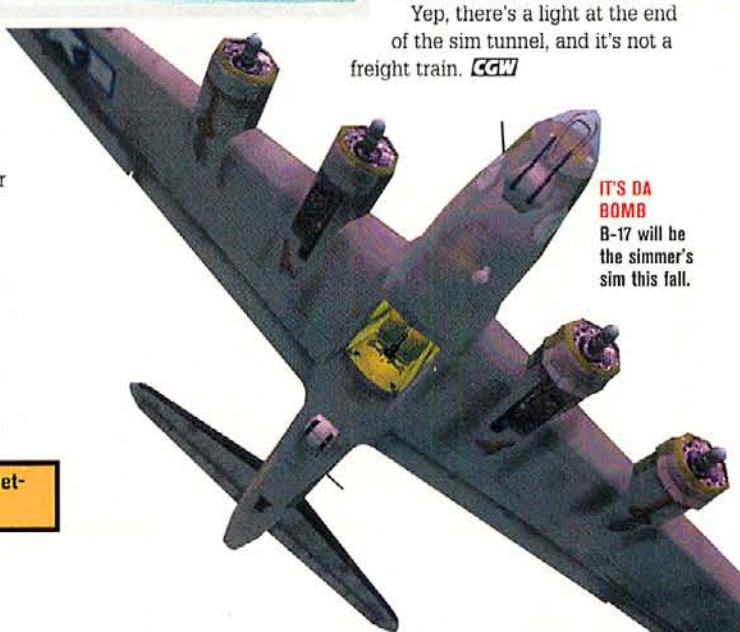
1. TACHYON
2. STARLANCER
3. COMMANCHE VS. HOKUM
4. BORDER ZONE
5. Counting down the days until HALO and NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

And the fate of the entire sim industry will rest on the shoulders of CRIMSON SKIES. Technically, no, it's not a sim by any true definition, but this game was the buzz on the lips of every editor and press weenie I met. It has managed to once again get people excited over the use of an actual joystick in this day and age of mouse-driven titles. It will be the olive branch between gamer and simmer. Think of it: A gamer might finally see sim-like elements for the first time and understand why they are so cool, and a stuffy and crotchety hardcore simmer might relax their sphincter enough to once again play a sim-like game that's made of the stuff they cut their teeth on.

Yep, there's a light at the end of the sim tunnel, and it's not a freight train. CGW



OUR HERO? CRIMSON SKIES, with its campy feel and wickedly fun gameplay, could well bring gamers back to sims.



IT'S DA BOMB B-17 will be the simmer's sim this fall.

When not engaged in aerial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.

Inside SPORTS

BY GEORGE JONES

End Game?

PC sports gamers take one on the chin



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Four months ago, after a mid-March visit to Redmond, we thought Microsoft was poised to stir up the PC sports-game industry. Inside Sports expressed joy and gratitude at the direction the company was taking with their sports line. The prospects of serious competition on the PC platform, we argued, held great promise for sports gamers.

But fantasy quickly turned into a nightmare as sports gamers learned that, despite early indications, Microsoft is getting out of the PC sports-game market this year...and possibly forever.

No 2001 Games

The absence of any Microsoft sports titles at E3 in Los Angeles appeared to confirm the early rumors circulating around Usenet's PC sports-game newsgroup in May that the Redmond giant was bowing out. A source within Microsoft spoke to these rumors, agreeing that there would be no new 2001 sports titles from Microsoft. "It's not because we lost money, but we felt it just wasn't realistic to get these products out this year without sacrificing quality." Instead, Microsoft will repackage NFL FEVER 2000 and NBA INSIDE DRIVE 2000 with updated rosters and statistics later this year. As for next year, "We haven't decided whether next year's products will be X-Box-only, or available on the PC."

This seems to indicate that Microsoft's decision is motivated more by the impending arrival of the X-Box than by any quality considerations. Even so, while sports games tend to shrivel in the PC market, they can go a long way towards legitimizing a new console system, which makes it particularly important for next year's wave of sports games to be strong. But this creates some concern: Could Microsoft be hoping that by releasing their sports games only on the X-Box, they will turn PC sports fans into early adopters of the new machine?

Other conspiracy theorists have even argued that this paves the way for a long-rumored Microsoft buy-out of Electronic Arts, although this seems a little dubious, given EA's connection with America Online.

Whatever the reasoning and whatever their future plans, the news is a severe blow to PC sports-game fans. And if Microsoft entirely foregoes future generations of PC sports games, the company is going to have to deal with some major backlash from fans who are already expecting the worst. "I hope their X Machine goes right in the crapper and they have to come crawling back to the PC with their hat in their hand," exclaimed one Usenet denizen. CGW

GEORGE'S MIX (E3 EDITION)

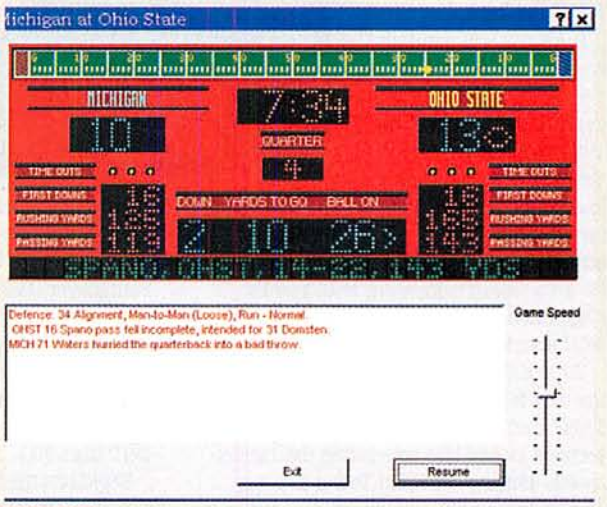
1. MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2
2. JOHN MADDEN 2001 for the PlayStation 2
3. HALO
4. SIGMA
5. STARTOPIA

POST-RETRO GAMING

The Wonder Years

Assuming that PC sports games are going bye-bye, here are three throwback sports games that combine the coaching, front-office strategy, and career play we like—and they'll even run on your laptop:

1. FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL: THE COLLEGE YEARS Game designer Jim Gindin has ambitious plans for the first college-football title we've heard about in years. Much like the original FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL, THE COLLEGE YEARS is focused on text-based career play. What's got us really excited isn't the graphics but the gameplay: You'll be able to recruit high-school players across the country, emphasize academics to recruit smart players, and possibly even deal with the murky aspects of college sports: alumni boosters, SAT scores, and graduation rates. Hopefully, this college game will be released later this year.



SCHOOL DAZE FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL: THE COLLEGE YEARS will challenge you to recruit high school stars and direct your team's academic and athletic accomplishments.

2. FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL 2 Speaking of FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL, we're drooling over this sequel from Jim Gindin, which will be distributed free by Electronic Arts with JOHN MADDEN 2001 in September. The original FRONT OFFICE FOOTBALL was a nominee for 1998 Sports Game of the Year, and this year's version will build upon its success. But EA's online plans for the game are what really get us going. In October or November, you'll pay $9.95 per month to manage a pro football team over the course of several consecutive rotisserie-style seasons. This could be huge for Electronic Arts.

3. OUT OF THE PARK BASEBALL 2 With HIGH HEAT 2001 on store shelves, you'd expect the Usenet newsgroups to be buzzing about baseball. But surprisingly, this text-only game has gotten almost as much buzz as 3DO's offering. OUT OF THE PARK, which can be found at **www.ootp.net**, features a massively-robust statistics engine that lets you play in career mode, managing a team's daily schedule as well as the finances and roster. Another great text-only game is DB Schmidt's STRATEGIC BASEBALL SIMULATOR: **www.geocities.com/dbschmidt1**. CGW

Inside ADVENTURE/RPG

BY DESSLOCK
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The RPGS of E3

This year's trade show proved that the genre is hotter than ever

E3 is the primary opportunity for game developers to demonstrate their wares to the often cynical gaming media, and to their antithesis: those keen—but goofy and uninformed—retail-sales representatives. While it's easy to empathize with the anguish a seasoned designer endures when subjected to the inane queries of ye local Wal-Mart representative ("So DIABLO is a person, not a puzzle?"), I can attest that it's similarly annoying to hear PR flunkies claim that their typically derivative products are going to "revolutionize" gaming.

This year, there was a surprising amount of diversity among RPGs at E3, and although there wasn't a single game that stood clearly above the others, almost all of them looked promising.

Top of the Deck

DIABLO 2 will naturally be a commercial blockbuster, and justifiably so, even though its graphics and gameplay are very similar to that of the original. ICEWIND DALE represents Interplay's attempt to produce a *D&D* hack-and-slash competitor to Blizzard's juggernaut, but it's shaping up to be a solid stand-alone product.

DEUS EX'S gameplay extracts some of the best features from SYSTEM SHOCK 2, THIEF, and HALF LIFE, but the "real-world" settings looked less convincing than anticipated—putting the Eiffel Tower in every screen doesn't necessarily create a convincing Paris—and the character animations and AI looked unpolished for a game close to release. Ion Storm's other RPG, Tom Hall's long-awaited ANACHRONOX, seemed to do a better job at creating populated, interesting environments. VAMPIRE should live up to its impressive promise, although the beautiful-looking engine suffers from clipping problems, and the environments are linear and simplistic.

ARCANUM, from creators of the original FALLOUT, is looking extremely good. Its innovative Tolkienesque/18th-century hybrid setting and tremendous gameplay depth are enticing, although its combat is less tactical than FALLOUT'S and its graphics may not be flashy enough to gain a broader audience.

Meanwhile, Back in the Old School...

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS and BALDUR'S GATE 2 both look excellent, with the latter game incrementally improving upon its predecessor and providing an even more detailed and authentic *D&D* experience. NEVERWINTER NIGHTS is a potentially huge product as its DM system and other enhancements may finally result in real, multiplayer *D&D* being effectively playable on a computer. POOL OF RADIANCE: RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR's graphics are superior to those in BG2, but its phased combat system still looks raw, and it's taking a less comprehensive approach to adapting *D&D* than BG2.



VIVA ARCANUM Desslock's top RPG at E3 is the fantasy/industrial extravaganza from the makers of FALLOUT.

DUNGEON SIEGE, SUMMONER, and LEGENDS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC feature a trio of the most impressive RPG engines ever, and the first two games also sport a number of original gameplay ideas—not surprising from the creators of TOTAL ANNIHILATION and FREESPACE 2, respectively. LOMM had its planned development period abbreviated, unfortunately, forcing the designers to carve back their ambitious design. But at least the monsters look good.

The next ULTIMA game is christened with the worst name in the history of gaming, ORIGIN, in a gesture to retain a company name endeared to so many gamers. Fortunately, the game itself looks very promising, although given the recent history of ULTIMAs, it would be prudent to adopt a "wait and see" attitude for this one. Lastly D.W. Bradley's WIZARDS & WARRIORS has gone through so many incarnations and flip-flopped on so many design features that any glamour initially associated with this title has long since dissipated.

DESSLOCK'S MIX (E3 EDITION)

1. ARCANUM: OF STEAMWORKS AND MAGICK OBSCURA
2. NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
3. VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE - REDEMPTION
4. BALDUR'S GATE 2
5. ANACHRONOX

RPG SALES

The Wizards at Wal-Mart

Shelf space at a major retailer can significantly broaden a game's exposure and enhance sales, which is why Wal-Mart is able to mandate standardized box sizes and special product demonstrations. RPGs are popular these days, but only DIABLO and BALDUR'S GATE enjoyed true blockbuster status, according to PC Data (with 1,300,000 and 500,000 unit sales, respectively). Other commercially successful RPGs such as FALLOUT sold around 150,000 units, while PLANESCAPE: TORMENT and ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION each sold only a lowly 75,000 units.

PC Data numbers account for sales in approximately 80% of U.S. markets, generally representing about 50% of the total sales worldwide. So what about the U.S. markets PC Data does *not* track, such as non-franchised software stores? The data retained by one of my local software retailers (**www.mediacape.ca**) was relatively consistent with the sales trends suggested by PC Data, although games that were critically acclaimed did far better in those more sophisticated, hardcore gaming markets—PLANESCAPE TORMENT crushed ULTIMA IX in sales at the dedicated gaming store.

For more information on RPG sales, check out my special feature at **desslock.gamespot.com.** CGW

Inside HOMEBREW GAMING

BY T. BYRL BAKER



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Good News for Wargamers

STEEL PANTHERS conversion is here, free—and a blast to play

In the inaugural Homebrew Gaming column I discussed a promising total conversion called STEEL PANTHERS: WORLD AT WAR. After several delays—due mainly to distribution rights problems caused when Mattel bought The Learning Company (which owned SSI)—the wait is finally over.

SP:WAW bears enough resemblance to the game it's based on to be immediately recognizable, and many of the play mechanics have carried over, but there are so many changes to the engine that this is really a brand-new game. Resolution has been upped from 640x480 to 800x600, making planning easier. All the game's graphics have been redone for the higher resolution, so they are both historically accurate and beautiful to behold.



BEACH BLANKET BANZAI STEEL PANTHERS: WORLD AT WAR is a wargamer's dream, and free to boot.

I'm especially impressed with the new sounds. Instead of playing the same file each time there is an exchange of gunfire, there are usually five or more randomly-picked sounds based on recordings of the actual weapons in action. The result sounds more like a war movie than a turn-based game, and all the sounds work together to create a terrific atmosphere of battle.

Good as the sights and sounds are, it's the gameplay that has me addicted. I've read dozens of memoirs from soldiers who fought in World War II, and the ebb and flow of battles in SP:WAW better matches the accounts I've read than any other turn-based game I've played. At last, snipers have the ability to delay squads for realistic amounts of time. Machine guns are deadly effective. Dug-in troops have serious advantages in both sighting enemies and ambushing reckless opponents. Vehicles can have individual systems damaged, but still remain in the fight. On the other hand, a pinned-down infantry squad may score a lucky hit on a critical part of an advancing tank, greatly reducing its ability to wreak havoc.

The game's artificial intelligence has been vastly improved, and troops act like their historical counterparts based on their nationality and training level. I didn't intend for this to turn into a full-blown review, but there's so much exciting stuff for tactical-combat fans in this release that I can scarcely contain myself.

While the game is being released for free, there is still a price to be paid—a 300MB+ download. Still, it's worth your effort to get one of the greatest gifts ever bestowed on wargamers. You can nab the game, plus new updates, missions, campaigns, and info at **www.matrixgames.com.** CGW

T. BYRL'S MIX (E3 EDITION)

1. STEEL PANTHERS: WORLD AT WAR
2. SOLDIER OF FORTUNE
3. PERFECT DARK on the Nintendo 64
4. WINGS OF FURY on the Game Boy Color
5. *Black Hawk Down* by Mike Bowden

Homebrew Spotlight

Assault Quake 3



QUAKE III has stolen much of my time lately, mainly because of the final release of ASSAULT QUAKE 3. No, it isn't like UNREAL TOURNAMENT's wild Assault mode, but it does add a massive amount of fun to Capture The Flag battles. In AQ3, it isn't enough to just nab the enemy's flag – you also have to defend it. Once you get the flag to your base, Assault mode is announced and a timer is triggered. If the enemy manages to touch the flag before the time limit runs out, you don't get any points. You get one point for defending the flag for half the time limit, and two more for fending off attacks for the entire countdown.

It's a simple premise, but one that completely changes the tactics of a standard CTF match. It requires a lot of teamwork, but don't worry if you can't round up a few friends for practice. I've found that the bot support is very good.

Assault Team, the creators of the mod, had a very concise goal in mind when they began work on the project: maximum carnage. Everything is designed to keep the ammo flowing and the frag counts high. Players choose a primary and secondary weapon when they enter the arena, and every time you respawn, you get maximum ammunition for your weapons. Ammo, health, and armor also regenerate automatically as you play, making kills tougher. If both flags are captured for a certain amount of time, a stalemate is announced and both flags are returned to their respective homes. A 20-minute overall time limit for the match also keeps the pressure on, eventually triggering a sudden-death mode or even sending the game into overtime if the scores are even. Give it a try by downloading the mod (along with the five new maps it comes with) at the Assault Team site, **www.captured.com/assault.**

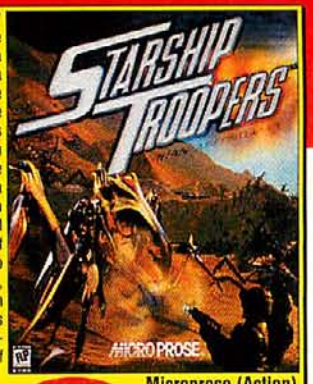
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INT'L 802-767-3033 FAX 802-767-3382

New Releases!

Vampire: Masquerade	PC	$39.95
Daikatana	PC	$28.95
Shogun Total War	PC	$37.95
Everquest: Ruins	PC	$34.95

'STARSHIP TROOPERS' puts the player in battle armor in the middle of a 3D game played from a chase perspective. While in the command ship, the player's character moves around without armor. In addition to planning the strategic elements of a mission, the player can eventually gain control over his entire squad if he wishes. Spaceship interiors, bug tunnels, buildings, wide open landscapes, and swarms of bugs attacking simultaneously are all a part of the game.



$38.95 Microprose (Action) Release: 8/00 PC CD

'ONI' is a third-person 3D action/adventure that emphasizes hand-to-hand combat & gunplay. Set in the year 2032, you play Konoko, an elite agent on a quest to infiltrate and destroy a ruthless crime syndicate. Missions can be completed through stealth or brawn.



Bungle (Action) Release:10/00 PC CD $42.95

COMPUTER GAMES: ACTION

Title	Release	Price
Alien Vs Predator	06/99	$29.95
Battlcrusier Tact Enga	08/00	$29.95
Daikatana	04/00	$28.95
Delta Force 2	11/99	$34.95
Descent 3 Mercenary	11/99	$24.95
Descent 4	04/00	$42.95
Die Hard Trilogy 2	03/00	$28.95
Evolva	05/00	$39.95
Half Life Adrenaline PK	01/00	$39.95
Half Life Oppsing Frc	11/99	$27.95
Half Life Team Fort2	09/00	$42.95
Half Life:Game of Year Ed	07/99	$32.95
Halo	05/00	$42.95
Heavy Gear 3	06/00	$39.99
Heavy Metal	06/00	$45.95
Hidden & Dangerous 2	04/00	$42.95
Hitman: Codename 47	05/00	$32.95
Martian Gothic	05/00	$39.95
Messiah	03/00	$39.95
Obi Wan	04/00	$42.95
Oni	09/00	$42.95
Quake 3 Arena	12/99	$33.95
Quake 3 Arena MP1	06/00	$26.95
Rainbow Six Gold	06/99	$22.95
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EA (Shooter) Release: 7/00 Release: 11/00

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GOD (Strategy)
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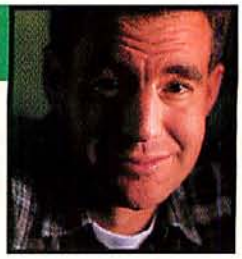
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by Jeff Green



The Next Hall of Fame Game

Jeff gets busy with his very own gaming project

There comes a time in every journalist's life when he must stop being a mere observer of life, a critic of others, and actually create something himself. That time has come for me at last. Although I'm sure I could keep ridiculing everything forever, I'm beginning to feel that at my age (94 this month), it's time to challenge myself, to "jump into the fray," as my mom used to say, and to "stop wasting the earth's oxygen."

So, I have a big announcement to make. After all these years on the sidelines, I am finally taking it all—my gaming expertise, my intellectual know-how, my All-American can-do gumption—and making a computer game of my own. Yes, I know it won't be easy. I know the road will be long and hard. But surely anything I come up with will be better than, say, a Simon and Schuster game, right? How hard could *that* be?

So what follows is a copy of my preliminary design notes. Please be forewarned that I'm sharing this information in good faith. If any of this actually shows up in someone else's game, expect a threatening call from the goons in Ziff's legal department.

■ ■ ■

Game Name

This is crucial. I'll need something catchy. Something sexy. Something the marketing guys will like. Something like JEFF GREEN'S PANCREAS. That has a good ring to it. It's got my name on it—which is an obvious plus—and research shows that gamers always go for those cool one-word titles, like MYST or QUAKE or ABOMINATION. It's clean and simple and gets the point across with maximum efficiency and energy. Alternate title: JEFF GREEN'S ALBATROSS.

Game Concept

What should the game be about? Always a conundrum, this. My publishers suggested I combine two of the most popular games of the past couple years into one: WHO WANTS TO HUNT REGIS PHILBIN? Not only did I reject this, but I threatened to void the contract altogether. I'm no whore, and I'm not going to settle for the Wal-Mart and bubba crowd with my very first game. Better to wait until I get desperate—like Activision and Sierra—before sinking to that level.

No, I aim to take the high road. Something that the hardest of the hardcore can embrace. Something to make me a Usenet hero. My game: a 2D turn-based flight sim, based on the obscure but beloved Belgian board game *Zuffstaffle Geese Fighters.*

This isn't about sales, okay? This isn't about "making a profit." This is about gaming, my friends. This is about integrity, with no compromise—ever.

Game Concept, Round Two

Okay, I just got off the phone with my publishers, and we've decided to compromise. Instead of the 2D turn-based flight sim, I've agreed to go with a 3D shooter—think TOMB RAIDER-lite. Also, we've got some sponsors on board, so the new title is PEPSI GEESE FIGHTER.

Main Character

One key element of success these days is to have a protagonist gamers can identify with. Although most gamers are male, they tend, interestingly, to identify best with attractive women with large chests and nice rear ends. This presents a problem. Since I am an enlightened, college-educated type, well-versed in women's rights, I am sensitive to the issue of female exploitation. Therefore, I will strongly insist that our character's breasts not be too jiggly and her thong bikini bottom remain on until at least the halfway point. Again, the key word here is integrity.

Tentative character name: Topless Tami.

I will strongly insist that our character's breasts not be too jiggly and her thong bikini bottom remain on until at least the halfway point. Again, the key word here is integrity.

Level Design

How many times have you played a 3D shooter with pointless plot elements pretending to drive you forward? I've dispensed with such trivialities here so we can focus more intensely on delivering the kind of hardcore action gamers want. To get through each of the game's five levels (cut down from the originally-projected 25), gamers will have to find three special items, which I've called the "red key," "blue key," and "green key." As an added "eye candy" bonus, each key will be emblazoned with the Pepsi logo. Research shows that gamers in the target demographic have strong brand loyalty. Finding keys will be like finding cans of Pepsi—thus making players love the game even more.

Design Team

Although my original recommendations called for an "A-Team" of the industry's best (Sid Meier, Peter Molyneaux, and Phil Steinmeyer were all short-listed), both budget concerns and deadline pressures have forced me into "Plan B." I'll be calling Simon and Schuster later this afternoon. If all goes well, expect to see PEPSI PRESENTS: TOPLESS TAMI'S SEX GUN ORGY (my new title) later this year. It's a game that the whole industry will be proud of.

Jeff encourages anyone who'd like to participate in the TOPLESS TAMI beta stress test to email him at jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

Computer Gaming World (ISSN 0744-6667) is published monthly by Ziff Davis Media, Inc. 28 E. 28th St., New York, NY 10016. Subscription rate is $27.97 for a one-year subscription (12 issues). Canada and all other countries add $16.00 for surface mail. Postmaster: Send address changes to Computer Gaming World, P.O. Box 57167, Boulder, CO 80328-7167. Canadian GST registration number is 865286033. Canada Post International Pub's Mail Product (Canada Distribution) Sales Agreement No. 1058649. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY 10016 and additional mailing offices. Printed in the U.S.A.

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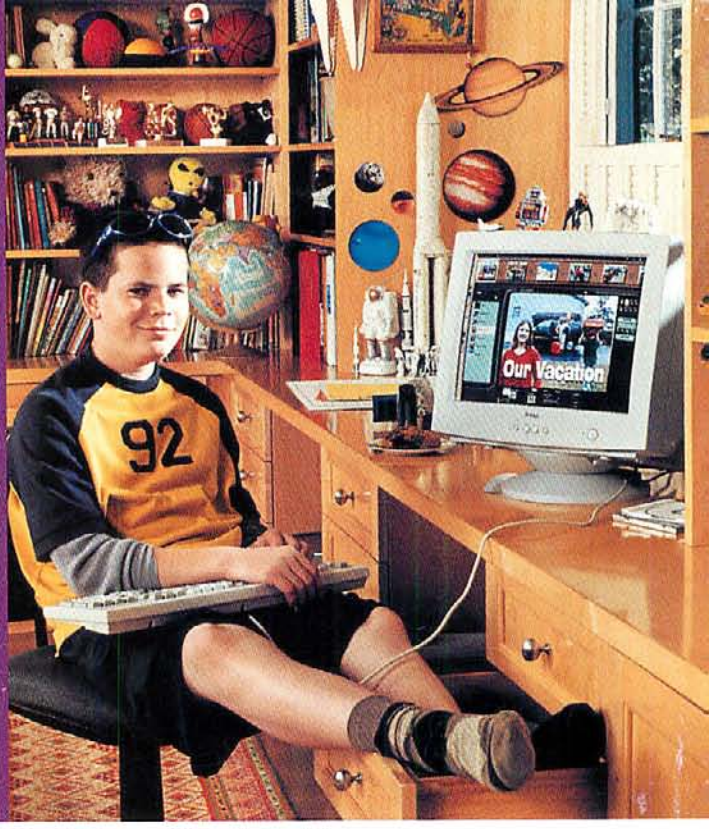
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